Disastrous Form from Kant to Hujar
Jacques Khalip
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LAST THINGS

VISIT…

LAST THINGS

Sara Guyer and Brian McGrath, series editors

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LAST THINGS

Disastrous Form from Kant to Hujar

Jacques Khalip

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First edition

To David Clark, Tracy Wynne, and Topher Gent,
and in memory of Dylan Duke Morse

Contents

List of Color Plates ix

Has-Been xi

Introduction: Now No More 1

1. The Unfinished World 20

2. Life Is Gone 46

3. As If That Look Must Be the Last 74

Acknowledgments 103

Notes 105

Index 135

Color plates follow page 66

Color Plates

1. Hubert Robert, *The Accident*
2. Tatsuo Miyajima, *Arrow of Time (Unfinished Life)*
3. Caspar David Friedrich, *The Polar Sea*
4. Paterson Ewen, *Close Up of a Planet with Three Satellites*
5. Joanna Kane, *The Somnambulists*
6. John Dugdale, *Death Mask of John Keats*
7. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Triumph of Life* manuscript page
8. Peter Hujar, *Triumph*

Has-Been

"I had a dream, which was not all a dream." When I left my first tenure-track job, I became, literally and figuratively, the last romanticist that the university had hired in many years. Simultaneous with my departure, or my last day, my predecessor and dear friend in the department, the senior and star romanticist who had shifted much of his scholarship toward Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment theory and philosophy, reinhabited the slot of the other last romanticist. Somehow, an end of the world had occurred, but it seemed alarmingly imperceptible to others. My friend and I were very much the opposite of the last men found in Byron's "Darkness," the "two / Of an enormous city [who] did survive" and lived on in the poem's ruinous end. We weren't enemies huddling together in the last moments of life but intimate dwellers inside this disturbingly ordinary, quiet, and ongoing emergency of last things. How could we both be the last? After all, one of us came before the other and the other left after. In our shared nonidentities, we were in two places at once and splitting the difference. To be the last is already not to be it, paradoxically, because to embody lastness means to endure under circumstances where enduring itself has been quenched. Quite vividly for my friend and for me, a world had been unworlded: We queerly coincided with an oblivion that was impossible to overcome since in our predicament, nothing of romanticism—and romantic studies—survived. We were still something but not quite the kind of governable "last subjects" that our university had psychically, professionally, and intellectually tried to impose upon us, just as corporate hostility to our research continued. Had we already become has-beens?

Now many years after, no one has replaced me in my former position. The hiring need for it was summarily eliminated by vote from the department's roster in favor of more student-friendly and grant-friendly fields of limited historical and temporal scope. Romanticism became the blip, the misfit of the family that was barely legible on new syllabi touting "Nineteenth-Century Studies"—a managerially established "field" of local materialities that absorbed romanticism without remainder into the false promises of a fulfilling modernity.

Since then, my friend and I continue to think about the haunting intermundia, the in-between status of the last, just as friends at other institutions continue to fight their own untimely experiences of lastness. Some would like romanticists to perpetually re-enact their disappearance like a fort-da game of survival, but wouldn't it be a more powerful repudiation to joyfully yield to that disappearance, even if one could never think it or properly live it? Would this be a last thought, a last feeling of romanticism?

We'll have to hold on to the unsustainable for thirteen weeks: after that, it will fade.

—Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*

. . . Stopping in the city while the light
Is red, to think that all who stop with you too must stop, and
Yet it is not less individual a fate for all that.

—James Schuyler, "Hymn to Life"

I place a delphinium, Blue, upon your grave.

—Derek Jarman, *Blue*

Introduction

Now No More

> —I cannot paint
> What then I was. The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite: a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm,
> By thought supplied, or any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,
> And all its aching joys are now no more,
> And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
> Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur: other gifts
> Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
> Abundant recompence.
>
> —William Wordsworth, "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey"

In his late essay "The End of All Things," Immanuel Kant zeroes in on what might occur when "the whole of nature will be rigid and as it were petrified: the last thought, the last feeling in the thinking subject will then stop and remain forever the same without any change."[1] As the stuff of apocalyptic belief, such a condition becomes an unblinking nightmare for the philosopher. He puzzles over what it would mean for a subject "to think itself into such a state," which, as you might expect, he says is unthinkable, because a subject who thinks and feels the last of everything at the end of the world craves a life ("if it can even be called a life," he adds) that is "equivalent to annihilation."[2] Resorting to Orientalist caricature, Kant scorns the practices of "Chinese philosophers" who, "sitting in dark rooms with their eyes closed, exert themselves to think and sense their own nothingness," but he also gets at something quite obscure and paradoxical here, as if reluctantly putting his finger on the ways in which philosophy compulsively turns and returns to stare at a limit of its own intelligibility, an impossible last thought where "all alteration (and with it, time itself) ceases—this is a representation which outrages the imagination."[3]

The essay belongs to the period of Kant's "anthropological" writings that are, as it were, so legibly nonphilosophical, and it is as if he sets the scene for the end of thinking (and philosophizing) at the margins of "philosophy."

Indeed, Kant presents the end to his readers as a *nonevent*, a fabular terror or black comedy that is insidiously textual and inscriptive and provokes delinquent significations working against mental clarity.[4] And yet, the last of everything, at least in Kant's text, does not amount to very much at all: If the end of all things is high drama—indeed, bordering on the sublime—then it is a scandal for the imagination rather than, say, reason. But the lastness that outrages Kant is the obverse of the sublimity found in the *Critique of Judgment*: Imagination neither fails at infinity nor cowers at its inadequacies but, more stupidly, it resembles a static TV screen left on at night. What kind of world or life could possibly exist on such an empty tank?[5]

There is something pressing about Kant's attempt to think two things at once: the end of thinking and feeling, and the end of *things*, or thinking and feeling *as last things*. Thought persists, but the unimaginable scene we are nevertheless asked to imagine is not quite about survival per se. Left idle, philosophy disappoints: Its last thought and last feeling dwindle down resources to a minimum of disinterestedness and embrace the residual as a negative form of repletion.[6] Such disinterest is utterly inoperative, a device or perhaps a figure without a philosopher to think it. In *Nihil Unbound*, Ray Brassier asks the question that Kant has on his lips but leaves unsaid: "*How does thought think a world without thought?* Or more urgently: *How does thought think the death of thinking?*"[7] At this final outpost, extinction turns thinking "inside out," obliterating the difference between mind and the world by exposing it to an externality that has no need for differentiation.[8] The exposure brings to the fore the indifference of thinking to thoughts that exist on their own. Put in this way, thinking is not a condition of possibility for a world of things and their ends but rather a "perishable thing in the world like any other (and no longer the imperishable condition of perishing). [Extinction] is an externalization that cannot be appropriated by thought—not because it harbours some sort of transcendence that defies rational comprehension, but, on the contrary, because it indexes the autonomy of the object in its capacity to transform thought itself into a thing."[9] For Brassier, thought is perishable like the very things it cognitively presides over. Every thought builds within itself its own lastness. But thingliness, in his account, is figural and not reifying, and in this way, he is not far from a dystopian version of John Horne Tooke's argument in *The Diversions of Purley* that thinking and things are etymologically related: "Where we now say, *I think*, the antient expression was—*Me thinketh*, i.e., *Me Thingeth*, *It Thingeth Me*."[10] In a notebook entry on Tooke's reasoning, Coleridge worries about the chaotic asymmetry that might underwrite thought's thingliness: "If therefore we have no will, what is the meaning of the word? It is a word without a Thought—or else a

Thought without a Thing, which is a blank contradiction."[11] If words must be thoughts and thoughts things so as to confirm an active, willful mind, in Brassier's entropic solitude, by contrast, thoughts float in short supply as unbidden, unclaimed, and unthought things or un*thought* thoughts. Without the benefit of interiority, they resemble what the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion calls, in a Coleridgean turn of phrase, "thoughts that have no thinker" or thoughts that force something like thinking to host them, as if the psyche had to be "called into existence to cope with thoughts" that are not accommodated by thinking at all.[12]

Kant is not quite there, yet. But by anticipating extinction head-on in his little essay, he exercises what he calls in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* abstraction or "negative attentiveness": "either the *paying attention to (attention)* or the *turning away from* an idea of which I am conscious (*abstractio*).—The latter is not the mere failure and omission of the former . . . but rather a real act of the cognitive faculty of stopping a representation of which I am conscious from being in connection with other representations in one consciousness."[13] There is a pedagogical practicality to abstraction, as if it had a special power to withstand and corral thoughts that are trying to get too close together, throwing Kant's concentration off like whispering students in a back row. Abstraction is minimally relational and transitive; it does the work of what Erving Goffman describes as turning away from others in fraught social interactions in order to keep the interaction in play in spite of its awkwardness. Goffman sees such "reaffirming gestures" as making society "safe for the little worlds sustained in face-to-face encounters," but Kant's need to see and think the end of things, even when he does not want to, is decidedly nonreparative and exceeds the social.[14] Additionally, it is all the more difficult to think through if we follow the distinction he makes between thinking and knowing in a note from the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "To cognize an object, it is required that I be able to prove its possibility. . . . But I can think whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself."[15] One cannot but wonder whether Kant invites us to think the last but not to know it, just enough of a disturbance within the frozen, unlivable world he worries over.

What Kant finds quite intolerable is that one learns nada from the end of all things, and because the last thought attaches itself to nothing, it is unteachable, moored, and unqualified to count as "knowledge"—something his withering image of the aftermath of a last judgment sketches out: "The inhabitants of the other world will be represented, according to their different dwelling places (heaven or hell), as striking up always the same song, their 'Alleluia!,' or else eternally the same wailing tones ([Rev.] 19:1–6;

20:15): by which is indicated the total lack of all change in their state."[16] This eternal return shows the same aimless things, thoughts, and actions taking place whether one is in hell or not, a death-in-life that impossibly condenses "All earth [to] but one thought," as Byron writes in "Darkness."[17] In this happy but naively blank after-world, the one thought endlessly rehearses itself in its inhuman insularity. At the time I was writing this introduction, I watched Abel Ferrara's film *4:44 Last Day on Earth* (2011), where planetary death becomes a mediatized event of endless communal atonements and platitudes: Cisco and Skye (played, respectively, by Willem Dafoe and Shanyn Leigh) have sex, make art, take drugs, Skype with loved ones, watch television, browse the Internet, and marry. If things will not go on, people somehow still do—the mantra of countless disaster films. *More feeling for feeling's sake*, the film recommends, as it reconciles us to an interconnected world of bland intimacies. Ferrara makes peace thinkable at the very moment that our lastness is avowed, but his film does not dwell on what happens to thinking once *life* and *world* have ceased as concepts.

In contrast to Kant's austere end of the world, I see another ordinary form of lastness in a painting by Hubert Robert entitled *The Accident* (Plate 1). On first glance, the elements are all too theatrically apparent, and yet I think Robert is attempting to get at something more than just a romantic misadventure in a neoclassical and ruinous any-place. *The Accident* meditates on the insignificance of our knowing look—the last look, as it were—and it builds up to this insight through a reversal of expectations. Staged in a detached, zoomed-out frame, the painting depicts a young man's fall as a scene tailor-made for art. Like Pieter Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* but more directly in view, Robert's fall beckons us to survey it as a happening that is caught in time but also underway. Somehow the accident has always been expected: Someone will arrive at the right hour and will stand just so in the perfect place to witness it or, more simply, turn toward it.

The security of that spectatorial perspective, however, is subtly compromised by several dynamics operating in the painting. The ruins on the left and the pyramid on the right call to mind specters of worn-out beliefs and faiths that haunt this environment of last things, "decaying, never to be decayed," things that cannot quite be brought to their extinction in the ripened present of Robert's work.[18] There is no "beyond" to the suddenness of the accident, and redemption would be an impossible claim to make in this capriccio with dead gods:[19] Abjuring the upward-and-outward transcendence offered up by the large swathe of sky, the man's fall marks a point where humans and things tumble into the accumulated debris that litters the flat earth.[20] The painting's impersonal junkspace evokes adjacencies and

combinations as opposed to depths and grounds, and in such a neutralized terrain, all figures are emphatically thingified.[21] To echo Paul de Man, "man" is reminded of "the purely instrumental, reified character of his relationship to nature. Nature can at all times treat him as if he were a thing and remind him of his factitiousness, whereas he is quite powerless to convert even the smallest particle of nature into something human."[22] To further underline such disintegration in his canvas, Robert paints the falling man in colors that double the various shadowy fragments of architecture and statuary appearing on the surface of the ruin. And even though his outstretched arms, *tache*-like hat, and fistful of flowers individualize him against the groups of figures at the top and bottom of the ruin, their petrification comes across as a frieze, while the vector of his fall is perilously terminal. One might imagine that at this point in the painting, Robert sets the scene for the ultimate expulsion of the "smallest particle" of the human from the world.

In *Absorption and Theatricality*, Michael Fried observes that Robert's art partially exemplified what Denis Diderot theorizes as "the fiction of being in the picture . . . the suggestion is that for Diderot the success as art of works in those genres depended on whether they compelled the beholder to imagine . . . that he was inside the painting."[23] One could say that the great derelicts of human success in *The Accident* serve to contain a spectator who, by gradually absorbing that ruination, turns his back on others and cultivates an alternative mode of aesthetic attention from within the painting. As a consequence, art meant for the beholder is negated in favor of a "pictorial unity" that represents "a single moment in a single heroic or pathetic action."[24] Fried's argument is quasi-phenomenological, and while it is potently available in Robert's painting, I would argue that something far more alien transpires there. In its remoteness, *The Accident* seems quite indifferent *to* that turning away, as if its world operated without us even having to be there to act upon it.[25] It decompletes habitation and habitat: Everything happens *en plein air* because nothing is left of "inner life" or "interiority" to absorb the work. The small figures on the right, picking up the painting's fumbled moral imperative, hopelessly run to avert the fall, while the young woman in the middle is caught between the ruin and the pyramid. Instead of legible faces, Robert gives small, superficial details or patches: The woman turns to the falling man, mouth open, but hers is not a look of acknowledgment or a cry for help. This slight act of beholding literally holds the man in the air like a visual balancing act while it roots her in midflight. Like a Deleuzian masochistic tableau, *The Accident*'s erotic freeze-frame formalizes an *asubjective* pleasure that permanently arrives too late: As a form of waiting that "represents the unity of the ideal and the real," Robert depicts the intensity

of that impossible unity.[26] This is the last look cast to sustain a last life, not in order to save it, but quite the opposite: to allow us to see the non-sense of the falling away of lives, their slow dispersal.

If there is a single visual image that illustrates what this book is after, it is this one: a thought of a last life as a *still life*, a photographic still, pictured in its unsustainability or, even more, its unlivability. The image is unconcerned with the place of the human in either an *ethos* or a *polis*: The young woman has no desire to turn responsibly toward another but merely looks in order to stop life in its tracks. Placed a quarter way up on the same level as the ruin's doorway to the left, she is mired in the midst of things, possibly having exited from the door as her body shifts rightward. To attend, to see, to sympathize with a fall that may or may not end in death is of no difference at all in this setting. This is "an ex-voto with no *deus ex machina*," writes Alexander Nagel, "a history painting with no great event."[27] Congealed, lastness precipitously lingers, but it often seems that we might not or ought not linger too much, as if fearing that we, too, will be taken hold by a look that will be the last, and that a life we thought was ours might soon be gone.[28]

The Wordsworthian inflection of this book deliberately leaves unspecified the last things that presumably we are so fearful of losing, and it stresses quieter, less emphatic ways of thinking the end of the world. Without fear, foreshadowing, or catastrophe, it explores lastness as the unthinkable but unavoidable limit of our lives and worlds. And in turn, it reads the fate of romanticism (and romantic studies) within the key of the last. After Kant and Robert, peering at the end of all things becomes a dark and murky business: We desperately wish to see the last in order to make sense of ourselves, to be assured that the last thought—as a hyperbolic version of the rhetorical figure of *hysteron proteron*, or the last put first—is never ultimately the last, that it might be a transitional object in a Winnicottian holding environment where the world still survives even after perishing.[29] Indeed, the last becomes all the more auratic and fetishized as the condition of repeatedly *not* being over: It is the very thing that must last, the perpetuation of the valediction.[30] In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari invoke the last as the hinge term that renders exchange possible but just short of its own extinction—the "penultimate, the next to the last, in other words, the last one *before* the apparent exchange loses its appeal for the exchangers, or forces them to modify their respective assemblages, to enter another assemblage."[31] Here the last is a limit instead of a threshold—the former "marking a necessary rebeginning," whereas the latter "the ultimate

marking an inevitable change."[32] The last is an addictive phenomenon, always second-to-last, and as an example, Deleuze and Guattari evoke an alcoholic's last glass as a figure for the limit at which a certain sufficiency must be reached in order for drinking to "rebegin."[33] While a threshold sets the point at which one assemblage passes over into another, the penultimate last glass leads to a backpedaling movement of "everlasting farewells," as Thomas De Quincey exclaims in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, where saying goodbye to his dreams of loss also means never being able to finally say goodbye.[34] Lastness would be an eminently followable but uncaptured state of things, as much about ends as it is about what Gerhard Richter calls "afterness," a term that sounds much like the last's cousin. Circling around Walter Benjamin's interest in "*Nachleben* (living on, living after, surviving, afterlife, or following)," Richter reads afterness as figuring the hauntological, inhuman machinery of modernity: It nominally connotes the difference between the thinking of a thing and its disappearance just as we seek to grasp hold of it.[35] The particularity of lastness, however, dramatizes another kind of representation and rhetoric: If afterness is a form of fading, lastness in this book stresses the repeatability or recoil of an end that is neither negative nor a new beginning—a finality that is something other than either a privation or a conclusion.

Pleasures around extinction, apocalypse, and ecological disaster are not foreign to what we call romanticism. Scholars have long studied how scientific and philosophical scholarship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries intersected with literary reflections on the time of the earth, geological signs of oblivion, and climate change, among other topics.[36] Last things, we often think and feel, make us nostalgically long for our lives: take a world, a life, a cataract, a rock, an aching joy, or a dizzy rapture, all of them "now no more." These represent things Wordsworth cannot renounce, cannot say no to, things he wishes could survive his desire for them even as their presences have retreated from sensation.[37] Famously in "Tintern Abbey," he believes he possesses the resources for overcoming crisis, and the ode, in turn, models for its readers a desire for communally enshrined future life. On one level, then, Wordsworth's *now no more* seemingly does this: The phrase is a lure of self-presence, a subtle moment where a difference in a world of loss is struck. Such a *now* is the repetition of a "generality," as Werner Hamacher writes about the formula of the *hic et nunc*.[38] And it follows what Hegel has to say about the *now* in the early pages of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: It is pluralizing and differential, referencing what has passed and what will always continue to pass in the future.[39] It is also temporally multiple: In Mary Robinson's "London's Summer Morning," for example, the various everyday events

happening in repeated nows ("Now begins/The din of hackney coaches," "Now ev'ry shop displays its varied trade," "Now the lamp-lighter/Mounts the tall ladder," etc.) open onto diverse temporal possibilities occurring at the same time in the city.[40] The "abundant recompence" that Wordsworth hopes to gain is edifying and recuperative, and it is supported by a subtle echo from the end of Milton's *Lycidas*: "Now Lycidas the shepherds weep no more;/Henceforth thou art the genius of the shore,/In thy large recompense, and shalt be good/To all that wander in that perilous flood."[41] If shepherds will not weep anymore once Lycidas is translated into heaven, what comes *after* the *now no more* of "Tintern Abbey" is the promise of an ongoing poetic life, even if its temporal and passionate raptures have faded. Thus on its surface, what the poem hopes to accomplish is a sentimental recovery from the disappointments of a blank past.

And yet . . . in a work so obsessed with survival—written "five long winters" after visiting the ruins of the abbey, an event already freighted with the phantoms of the French Revolution and the accompanying traumas of Wordsworth's difficult sojourn—the nets of memory, inheritance, life, temporality, nature, and affective immediacy prove parochial.[42] Something *else* happens in Wordsworth's small semantic unit: *Now* there is *no more* knowing, thinking, or feeling of *this or that*. If we read the line as a fragmentary shudder, who or what says it? The words *now no more* are diffident, unemphatic, and without solace; posited in careful succession and read left to right, what is *now* seemingly comes first only to be followed, modified, and ultimately withheld by the *no* and then finally re-emphasized by the *more*. But at the same time, the words *do not* follow each other or, rather, they seem unreadable: On a micro-level, they dangle and drag, refusing to be amplified into any style of thought that would want to assimilate the *now no more* into a coherent relation—a *now-no-more*, for example. Avatars of the last, they adduce what Diana Fuss calls the "structural impossibility of dialogue and debate" that etches lastness as a prohibition and a refusal.[43]

The *now no more* suspends knowledge about what there is, or what potentially there will be, no more of in the world. Indeed, *world*, as a matter of thinking and inscription, as a limit, a boundary, or an edge, becomes something else: spare, estranged, indifferent, unassimilable, inhuman . . . a world that is less a world or, perhaps, just less. Under such circumstances, the *now no more* reads like a meme of lastness, rhetorically conclusive and yet given to repeat its posthumous energies in the way that Shelley does in *Adonais* when he exclaims that Keats "will awake no more, oh, no more!"[44] Shelley repeats the phrase twice with the effect of affectively prolonging it, as if to create a mood of perpetual closure and nonawakening that infuses

the elegy's demolition of life. This "last breath" or "last scene" of romantic extinction, like Wordsworth's *now no more*, is not Shelley's to make; it is something unlived and unlivable, a *now no more* that exceeds the rites of poetic commemoration.[45] The *now* becomes a refused (and refusing) deictic, turning away from the security of a world upon whose stable grounds a human life was thought possible. Here is a world that cannot be lived as a world. The *now* is the other side of just saying no: It does not desire anything else, either before, after, then, or soon. It is remarkably antisensational in its complex, linguistic sobriety.[46] For the *now no more*, the world does not just end like a disaster movie—it is already conceptually extinct.

In this book, the last thought of the *now no more* appears as an obstinate borderline of thinking and meaning. I reflect on how modes of lastness become instances of unworlding, unliving, and unthinking that tarry with the formal expenditure of the given. In this way, my book is about reading for the last as well as a kind of "last reading." It is not, however, a strict elegy to the human or to romanticism; what it does do is urge that we read romanticism otherwise. Writing this book in the time of the ruin of the humanities, I have been alert to two hauntingly acute contexts murmuring in the background: the marginalization or near-term extinction of romantic studies in the profession and recent work in the humanities and humanistic social sciences on the inhuman/nonhuman/posthuman, the ecological, and the Anthropocene. These contexts engage different historical, institutional, and rhetorical approaches, and they are also timely and critically unignorable. They galvanize a romantic split between, on the one hand, figures of lastness and catastrophe and, on the other, investments in pedagogical affirmation, survival, affective surplus, and an ethics of stewardship in a world where images of the worst fuel fantasies about a future that is narcissistically planned only for our recovery.[47] These backgrounds collide as things that are inescapably thought and felt *today*, and I borrow that word in all its singularity from Michel Foucault's response to Kant's essay "What Is Enlightenment?" where he uses it to examine why and how Kant is brought to radically think about a particular moment as historically important.[48] To think in and with the *today* means to confront and remain porous to phenomena whose resonances are not immediate, legible, or ready-to-hand, but pressingly underway. Unknowable and hard to expect, *today* evokes contingent clashes of history and time that cannot be winnowed down to any point of view. What is part of today is caught at last sight, bidding farewell to itself just as it becomes displaced by other discrete todays. It is also important to underline that for Foucault, the today is not just an iteration of a yesterday, a tonight, or a tomorrow but an "exit" or "way out"; not an exit that is simply another kind of entrance, as it were, but a

departure from the certain.[49] In this manner, the *now no more* begins to sound more insistently like the *today*: As a form of exiting, it disturbs complacency and obstructively refuses what is at hand. If one could spatialize the today, it would be, I imagine, in the middle or in the midst but not as in "in the midst *of* x" or a middle in the sense of *media* with its multiple transfers that seek to ferry meaning back and forth. In Sean Gaston's rich description, the midst would figure "*as the uncontained*": "The *midst* would not be the middle, as a subject-orienting ground or position, but *in medias res*, a finding oneself in the midst, in the middle of a relation to an indefinite and ungraspable beginning and end. . . . The midst as the uncontained would also offer no wider perspective or superior vantage point on the world."[50] The midst is the interval where every "vantage point" has already ended. Each relation finds itself to be always already in the midst of itself, on the eve of the uncontainable and without a posited spot of earth to support it. "The space between is a perilous passage in which one cannot live," writes Stacey D'Erasmo. "The prepositions *to* or *from* are mandated, and in very concrete terms. Indeed, the prepositions *to* and *from* have tremendous power at the moment. They are the prepositions du jour, if not de siècle. One can live and die of them."[51] Reflecting on the 2015–2016 European refugee crisis and contemplating bodies thrown into forced movement between worlds, D'Erasmo movingly traces the injurious risks of that in-between space as the space of the today, where every moment is the last, and how much fatally mitigates against a midst that refuses to open up or accept anything thrown into that passage.[52]

In polemical terms, then, this book is about dwelling with the last of romanticism and romantic studies *today* and addressing the *now no more* as the midst in which we find ourselves. I have divided it into three speculative chapters that unfold in fits and starts via close readings of literary and visual texts; I promiscuously toggle between temporalities, and my in-and-out-of-focus style deliberately pursues lastness as a powerful object and optic that is constantly shifting like disappearing images in a rearview mirror. My turns to contemporary theorists and artists are intended: They are less associative value add-ons than sites where the disastrous forms of romantic lastness are repeated and explored. In the first chapter, I turn to Roland Barthes's passing meditation on Caspar David Friedrich's painting *The Polar Sea* as a starting point for describing Wordsworth's thoughts on what I call an unfinished world: Singularly averse to co-optation, the unfinished contrasts with tropes of containment that seek to capture the world as a thing that is nominally our own. A concluding section on the Canadian painter Paterson Ewen's *Close Up of a Planet with Three Satellites* alongside a sonnet by Wordsworth on the planet Venus pushes the discussion toward theories of anonymity, planetarity,

and the inhuman. Chapter 2 explores how David Hume's remark in an essay that "life is gone" might be understood as an attempt to acknowledge the inconsequentiality of the very thought of life. I begin with readings of texts by John Clare, Wordsworth, and William Godwin and then move to consider photographs by Joanna Kane and John Dugdale as instances of what Keats calls "posthumous existence," his articulation of how one might wish to relinquish life as a thing held in reserve for human thought and its survival. The final chapter reads the third-to-last line of Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*, "as if that look must be the last," as an aside that asks what occurs after that last look. In a post-Waterloo poem that imagines a hallucinatory end-of-the-world scenario amid several last things, including a kiss, Shelley explores the adjacencies opened up in his unfinished late manuscript. Drawing on Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie*, an illustration from that book by Nicolas-André Monsiau, and a photograph by Peter Hujar, I characterize Shelley's poetic experiment as tacitly queer insofar as it refuses to endorse a normative politics of life and imagines bodies and pleasures as scintillatingly regressive, inoperative, and disappearing.

Although traditional criticism supports the rumor that romantic studies tends to fall on the side of worldmaking, progress, and life, the professional state of the field today actually evidences just the opposite: Many North American English departments, including some top-ranked ones, barely employ one romanticist on faculty, if any at all, something the job market reflects each year with fewer and fewer advertisements for romanticists at either junior or senior levels. Attendance at the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR) continues to ebb, while romanticism panels at the Modern Language Association (MLA) have massively shrunk. The number of university presses that are even remotely hospitable to publishing work in romantic scholarship is also alarmingly low, while areas like early modern, Victorian, or American studies continue to stay on editors' radars. Beyond the field, romanticism has become the dusty antique artifact of the historicist roadshow—an utter "has-been," but not only in Barthes's sense of those words as limning a photograph's capacity for temporal self-certification (i.e., the photograph shows *what has been* in the past).[53] I mean "has-been" as a campy gloss for a species of washed-up former star who anachronistically lives over or exceeds his or her officially sanctioned "life" or expiry date.[54] Romanticism is just this kind of has-been celebrity, and if there were a romantic mood to characterize it, it would be the equivalent of a wasting away or full-blown extinction—perhaps even the extinction of mood itself as a principle of "deep-structural situatedness" that qualifies less romanticism's being in the world than its dismissal from it.[55]

In a sobering article written years ago, Tilottama Rajan reminds us that the institutional abridgment of romanticism into the so-called field of the "Nineteenth Century" is one effect of historicism's bureaucracy of the has-been. Romanticism is compartmentalized as the latent event that precedes and is ultimately surpassed by a more purposively inclined (and culturally edifying) Victorian studies, which, in its own right, exemplifies the reorganized relation of the humanities to the social sciences. From a theoretical and disciplinary point of view, romanticism is stillborn, stubborn, and unteachable, an abject concept that cannot be assimilated to a modernity that "entails the technologization of the self and the study of individuals in terms of how they are governed."[56] In this sense, the euthanasia of romanticism today is the collateral damage wrought by neoliberalism's logic of cost-benefit analyses, picking off disciplines and fields based not on which ones are less useable but rather which areas are given to critically think extinction and are thus *already extinct* by virtue of their own self-imaginings. Perversely, I argue, romanticism's force derives from its has-beenness, its remainder-like status as a perishable thing that a bureaucratized culture cannot accommodate. It is this that makes it institutionally and intellectually risky. The lastness I theorize throughout this book desists from an agonistic brand of romanticism that David L. Clark and I have critiqued as conceptually expansionist and maximalist: "Temporal and historical parameters of what romanticism 'was' and 'is'; romanticism's theoretical suppleness and expansiveness; its *too much-ness*, its affective expansiveness and rhetorical disruptions; its 'uncontainable' and effusive structures; its slippery ambivalence as a term that either says too much or too little about the limits of historical thought; its putatively close engagements with vitality, 'life,' creativity, infinity; and its ongoingness as a conceptual marker of modernity, refusing to bury a past that inscribes present temporalities through and through."[57] It is romanticism's inhuman intransigence to making something of itself, to narratives of modernization, coherence, and social legibility, that brings it up against its lastness, and clearly, this is not what criticism often complaisantly wants romanticism to be. A recent book like Peter Gay's *Why the Romantics Matter* continues to read romanticism as a vital pedagogy that is meaningful and makes romantic identity (i.e., the "Romantics") matter for the inexperienced. Ironically, romanticism matters precisely because it disappears from the rest of Gay's book, which interprets it as a speed bump on the way to modernism and modernity. Thus by speaking and not speaking about romanticism, Gay entirely occludes the status of the profession and the crisis of romantic studies altogether.[58]

To read romanticism—and romantic studies—as already extinct is a reading no romanticist would wish for, yet it is one, I argue, that we should

hazard to make today. I focus on the minima of lastness in romantic poetry, philosophy, and critical theory, as well as contemporary postromantic photography and painting: a world, a life, a look, a love, and a kiss. Last things are singularities, hovering in the complex relationship between appearance and disappearance, life and nonlife, world and nonworld, materiality and immateriality. They are not residually melancholic or traumatic; indeed, there is nothing broadly psychological about them. They are unobtrusive, almost nothing. I attend to various small or minor lasts as figures that are both everywhere and nowhere, as if torn from their larger and more fulfilling apparatuses and contexts. Such things might have some complementarity with what Timothy Morton calls "hyperobjects," or things of such enormously imperceptible magnitudes (global warming, for example) that they have now effectively displaced and ended the world as a figure. But the difference I trace is to the side of Morton's argument. The unit of the *now no more* is not spatially and temporally vast; while it is similarly unthinkable, it is far meeker in its recessiveness, as if indifferent to the imperative to take social and political action "because action on Earth (the real Earth) depends on it."[59] It is impersonal, apathetic, and inoperative. It is a *hypo-object*: It promises little to nothing. My book shares more with the arguments found in Rei Terada's *Looking Away* and Anne-Lise François's *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience*, although it slightly shifts from them as well insofar as the poetics I trace are neither psychological nor ethical—a poetics, in other words, that does not cultivate an ethos of sufficiency and human provisionality.[60] I prefer to subscribe to an art of farewell, or what John Paul Ricco calls a "disappeared aesthetics" that is on the side of the neutral, the imperceptible, "a refusal of either/or logics" that dictate the coordinates of legibility in the world. This would be an aesthetics that does not recuperate the last, does not catch it like a fly in amber, but dwells with it in its fleeting gestures, derealizing humanistic investments in futurity, endurance, life, and expressiveness.[61] Each of my chapters displays a fascination for a different species of lastness: insensible philosophical and poetic things, figures, and affects of uneven development that, in their nonequivalencies, *surnage* or float, as Jacques Derrida calls the dreamy (im)mobility of biodegradables in his eponymous essay. Unlike Winnicott's transitional objects—not-me trinkets that can be endlessly destroyed and yet survive by virtue of the fact that they enable us to make sense of a world—Derrida considers how the "biodegradable" is at once something made but not useable for the subject, utterly material and figural. "*On the one hand*, this thing is not a thing, not—as one ordinarily believes things to be—a *natural* thing. . . . *On the other hand*, the 'biodegradable' is hardly a thing since it remains a thing that

does not remain, an essentially decomposable thing, destined to pass away, to lose its identity as a thing and to become again a non-thing."[62] Such "things" are disasters or *chutes* (falls, accidents) of a certain kind: They are unassimilable to economies of recognition, subjectivity, and duty, not of this world but still somehow in a relation to it. As a consequence, they evoke queerer, antinormative exchanges that pass and mean without the coercions of identity and relation.[63]

If there is something structurally impossible about learning from the last, it is also the case that lastness is a genre of sorts, "an inexhaustible eschatology of final words," Derrida states, "in a word, a last word, a litany," or an endless pressure of multiple lasts that are never capable of being finally done with.[64] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one etymological sense of *last* refers to the "sole of the foot" or "footprint," "a mark or trace left on the ground by the foot," "a track."[65] It is this precise sense of *last* that Stanley Cavell partly draws on in his reading of the final paragraph of Emerson's "Experience": "Patience and patience, we shall win at the last. We must be very suspicious of the deceptions of the elements of time."[66] Cavell describes the last as "an instruction about philosophical patience," a way of moving on after abandonment: "Hence it speaks of a succession as a leaving of something, a walking away, as the new world is a leaving of an old, as following your genius is leaving or shunning something."[67] Lastness is synecdochal but barely evidentiary; as a modality of skepticism, it connotes a mind that shuns itself and passively suffers the end of all things as an ongoing practice of life. For Cavell, lastness is like a dropped breadcrumb, reminding us that there is always more to look forward to just as we feel deserted. Indeed, his ethics of leave-taking has the effect of both repudiating and keeping the world in place for the skeptic as he walks away from it, although Cavell also explicitly casts doubt on how much of that world is left for our imaginations to tangle with. "Each Second is the last/Perhaps, recalls the Man,"[68] Emily Dickinson writes, associatively stressing "second" as unit of measurement, interval, and time. But as something man inwardly "recalls," "Just measuring unconsciousness/The Sea and Spar between," the recollection is by definition a second-to-last surmise, just as soon forgotten as it is "perhaps" remembered. Conjuring a poem that is, at least theoretically, at sea and not on land, Dickinson's last, unlike Emerson's or Cavell's terrestrial footfalls, seems like a receding gesture that refrains from any kind of reckoning or succession. In this way, the repeated finality that lastness tolls (each second is the last just as each second is minimally different from the other) also declines to bear the weight of the world as a philosophical task. "To fail within a Chance—/How terribler a thing/Than perish from the Chance's

list/Before the Perishing!" Etymologically, chance is a fall, and Dickinson's last is a syncope rather than a measure of patience—a halting moment within thought. It also might be a guess or risk about nothing. I want to ask if romanticism's *now no more* could be another way of articulating this Dickinsonian second-to-lastness as a nonimpactful relinquishment of hard-won and accrued experience, a refusal of just those principles of patience and survival that yoke, for example, philosophical and aesthetic form to life, process, and accumulation. That such a refusal is often misheard as desperation only testifies to a reluctance to approach the unthinkable or the attenuated means of thought—an impoverishment that might be like Edward Said's "late style" of thinking, for example, an "unproductive productiveness going *against*" that occurs within an artwork: "Late style is *in*, but oddly *apart* from the present."[69] Said's lateness is agonistic: It refuses parts and wholes, "surviving beyond what is acceptable and normal; in addition, lateness includes the idea that one cannot really go beyond lateness at all, cannot transcend or lift oneself out of lateness, but can only deepen the lateness."[70] But whereas lateness for Said is still implicated in matters of life, death, and living on, the last appears in my book as a spectral form that is impossible to economize by or for human experience at all.

"The human psyche naturally rebels against the idea of its end," writes Roy Scranton, as if channeling Kant, in his bestseller *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*.[71] The strongest aspect of the book lies in its emphasis on dying as a stoic form of education that abjures the restorative promises of civilization. After all, the Anthropocene is, for Scranton, the moody lesson of Western culture's lastness: At once periodizing (i.e., human impact became measurable "around 1800 with the onset of industrialization")[72] and a limit to periodicity (that impact, although ours, is also unreadable since its language is geological), it corrodes and rewrites history as the matter of our destructive dwelling at the end-of-the-world. But Scranton's meditation on death, while taking on the end as an occasion for imagining practices of human atonement, also misses a necessary point: To return to questions of mortality and human limits is to hold onto them as master tropes of care, concern, and belonging. As Claire Colebrook notes, the Anthropocene is, by definition, elegiac—it symptomatically indicates our inability to think against life because it too predictably mourns a death that can only be experienced from our point of view.[73] It would be through *our* death, Scranton suggests, that a proper relation to the earth could be recursively generated, a relation marked by the traumatic failure of our oversight that then, in turn, translates

into reflective (albeit traumatized) growth. It seems, finally, that one cannot be too careless about dying for the world.

Quite counterintuitively, the Anthropocene's end-of-the-world afflatus casts a consolidating and promissory effect: Even if it is not sacrificial, it is hard not to read it as establishing a secure haven for keeping alive the thought of the world, either through the knowing subject, the epoché, spirit, the "human," survival, the living present, analytical thought, etc. The *anthropos* of the Anthropocene becomes the figure for the felicitous simultaneity of man and anachronism: Paradoxically, our disruptive impact also falls in line with—and parallels—the out-of-jointness of our thought, since the anthropos tropes thinking as a capacity for self-differentiation and disjunction.[74] Scholarship on the Anthropocene often focuses on catastrophic narratives, but such narratives are derived from (or are supplemental to) critical projects that privilege the exceptionality of human life as the very thing that must be feverishly preserved against the darkness of the inhuman. For example, the anthropos surfaces in Giorgio Agamben's account of the untimely "darkness" encountered by a masculine "contemporary . . . he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness."[75] This darkness of the contemporary evokes for Agamben the *archaic*, or what is unlived in the present and yet "does not cease to operate within it, just as the embryo continues to be active in the tissues of the mature organism, and the child in the psychic life of the adult."[76] Ironically, Agamben's notion of the "unlived" is subsumed into the reproductive stuff of heteronormative life: It contributes to humanism's own civilizing and vitalistic impulses. In this sense, the Anthropocene *is* the archaic in that it makes the unlived livable: It renders possible our current politics of human recovery and sustainability by figuring the dark event as the unborn potentiality through which we are able to read ourselves as we are not, both multiply in the past and in the future. It helps us to assess, from inconceivable perspectives, how the nonhuman catastrophe occurred and how to calculate future responses to it.

In *Learning to Live Finally*, Derrida considers the *in*educability of life as a rupture of humanist "apprenticeship" or "discipleship": "Can one learn . . . to *accept* or, better, to *affirm* life? . . . I never *learned-to-live*," he writes, as if the latter could be condensed into a practice, a pedagogical formula.[77] When Derrida says that he is "uneducable" and a survivor, he is less interested in autobiography than the idea that he might be a sort of last thing that is unthinkable to itself—a last thought that is "narcissistic" to the extent that its world is not the world of other beings but an unfinished, inorganic thing radically cut off.[78] And as a thing, "Derrida" becomes a perishable and insular quantity, an instance of Cavell's *last* or vestigial footprint disappearing into

the earth and air, one that neither immediately translates over to a future legibility nor endures as the residue of an intellectual "inheritance" of the past that can be patiently read.[79] The uneducable is inhuman and *non*potentializing; it confronts what Deborah Britzman calls the anterior "unthought" of learning that inscribes and yet is incompatible with pedagogy, knowledge, and transmission—in other words, the last thought. It is unwanted and without context; it brings up "the paradox that while the needed experience of education somehow forms thought, the very thought of education is difficult to think" because it is the unlived within our lives.[80] For Britzman, then, education queerly thinks something "in" us that is not our own; it takes "place within us yet [leaves] us feeling as if its events happened without our knowing why."[81] In this sense, it is like a version of trauma theory: If trauma is an unthinkable, unclaimed thing that signifies the lastness of affected experience, then it is for this exact reason that it becomes, in certain critical discourses, the very thing that we are responsible for psychically bearing (like Cavell's last). Derrida and Britzman, however, invoke an uneducable lastness that is provocatively prior to the psyche, an originary absence of a testing ground for thought—a groundlessness or worldlessness—that cannot be borne by us.[82]

If, at some point, "Romanticism" designated the era that made history different at the end of the eighteenth century—which is to say, if we think of it as the period of human rights, liberalism, women's rights, animal rights, discourses on race, slavery, and abolition, cosmopolitanism, total war, critical theory, literature and periodicity, the reorganization of the modern university, among other things—the Anthropocene might be yet another trope for the kind of historical situatedness that romanticism appears to always revolutionarily inaugurate. As Marc Redfield reminds us, however, romanticism "occurred—when, exactly, is forever uncertain, because romanticism altered our understanding of temporality," which is another way of saying that romanticism *is* uneducable and errant.[83] Whenever we claim that romanticism is either *this* or *that*, we are also claiming a right to "romanticism" and its attending discourses (as the title of the 2015 North American Society for the Study of Romanticism annual conference advertised).[84] In turn, such a claim implicitly keeps romanticism as the spiritualized object behind our professions of faith: The more we want it, the more we authenticate ourselves by pledging allegiance to it. For Hamacher, writing on debates about human rights, the human is the figure that tries to exclusively recover the concept of "right" as a kind of impossible phenomenon that domesticates a nonrelationality within linguistic positing: "The political, anthropological, and theological authorities who claim to be the advocates of human rights

would serve the justice, freedom, and dignity of man best by expanding the zones of their indecision and by bringing about circumstances in which none of their rights need ever be appealed to—circumstances in which the right not to need and not to use rights could be exercised without any limits."[85] If there is such a thing as a right, then there must be a right not to have it, a right to say and be nothing, the right not to have to say anything at all, the right not to use and *to* use—in other words, the nonright to none of those concepts subtending what it means to have a right and, as a consequence, to have *a* romanticism.[86] What would it mean to take the *now no more* as expressing just this: not a right to rightlessness but something like the lastness of *our* right to that which we cannot stand to gain? A right that perishes like other last things and bears no direct relation to our wish to have it? Would *this* be a last of romanticism?[87]

Throughout this book, I read the last in ways that recall the kind of disfiguring resistance Paul de Man long ago traced out in "linguistic structures, the play of linguistic tensions" that are nominally "inhuman" in that they indicate a material indiscernibility within humanism, exposing it as something "illegitimate, as illegitimate as turns out to be, in the final run, the interpersonal rapport, which is illegitimate too, since there is, in a very radical sense, no such thing as the human."[88] *No such thing*: The phrase is extraordinary in its clinical dismissiveness, as de Man cannot even begin to legitimate a thing that for him neither walks nor talks. The human is illegitimate in a radical or root sense: It is the mere phenomenalization (rather than origin) of a nonevent that has no referential rootedness and appearance. It is a has-been. Its inscriptions, for better or for worse, fall on the borders of the livable and the unlivable. Whether one abjures this dismissal or pays tribute to it, either perspective tolerates a certain idolized relation or "rapport" to minutiae that de Man does not want to recognize, even as he is irrevocably made to evoke them—for example, wanting the interpersonal means envisioning a social coherence to the nothingness or want that inscribes "us," a coherence that persists and reassures that "linguistic structures" are always more than just structures. De Man pushes away any argument that tries to tell us what we are, what we need, or what we should be, keeping the "human" as far as possible from collapsing into "the social" or "the organic." The human ends, or rather it is a figure at the very last (second to last, perhaps), impossibly and imaginatively challenging a false rhetoric of coherence. After all, last things are parts absent any whole, last and nothing more; they are without "interpersonal rapport," but that does not make them naively autonomous. They just do not want to cooperate with the idea that there are things—like a world, a life—that we should respectfully sustain, in ourselves or in others.

I conclude this introduction by looking at an installation by the Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima, my final example of how the *now no more* is something that simultaneously is and is not an end of the world. In *Arrow of Time (Unfinished Life)* (Plate 2), a piece that was created for the Met Breuer's 2016 exhibit *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible*, the ceiling of a dark gallery space on the museum's lobby floor is entirely suspended with thin, red LED lights, each programmed "to count from one to nine repeatedly, then go dark momentarily, and then repeat the sequence."[89] Here, as if proof positive of Dickinson's point, each second *is* the last, but I also cannot help but see Miyajima's setup as humorously mimicking Robert's accidental fall: One looks up at the LEDs, out of reach but not out of sight, numbers flickering throughout the ceiling like small doomsday timers that are at once unique and identical. Unlike the shooting stars that Kant enumerates as one of the many possible portents of the end of all things, these lights will not let go into a timeless time. Instead, they annul themselves without any trace of eventfulness. These are endings without ends that we do not have to believe in.

One looks but does not know why; one's experience in the room is not undesirable, but at the same time, it does not satisfy any kind of lack or aesthetic need. And that is the point: *Arrow of Time (Unfinished Life)* renders thinkable the unfinishedness that underlies the aesthetic in Kant's philosophy[90] but exacerbates it to the point where appearing and annulling become programmable points of fascination in a space where finitude and elegy invite absence to take place without regret, deficit, or catastrophe. Like the *now no more*, the lights can be contemplated even as they substantialize thoughts of extinction that reason would rather not endorse. Miyajima marks time by spatializing lastness in situ: The LED ceiling parodies a sky that is less transcendental than carefully made or even decorative. His aesthetics of unlearning occurs with world-ending, a literal afterthought that meaninglessly goes on with or without a thinker/spectator, one who does not cope with thoughts but rather, like Dickinson's speaker, emptily watches each one count down. The idea of the clock in *Arrow of Time (Unfinished Life)* also reminds me of Kant's example from *The Conflict of the Faculties* of the old man who keeps "numerous clocks in his room" and makes them "strike always one after another, never at the same time," playfully flatlining the art of time-keeping. For Kant, there is a quiet joy and pleasure in this quasi-serious performance: It is a "substitute" for philosophizing and prolonging life. Although the old man's behavior typifies his "limited intelligence," at the very last of his life he is "busy doing nothing" and, as a result, he is "carefree," "merely puttering," and "long-lived" among his dysfunctional collection of clocks.[91] The end of the world has never been so colorfully late to its own arrival.

1. The Unfinished World

> They had been warned of what was bound to happen.
> They had been told of something called the world.
>
> —Donald Justice, "The Wall"

> A romantic painting shows a heap of icy debris in a polar light; no man, no object inhabits this desolate space; but for this very reason, provided I am suffering an amorous sadness, this void requires that I fling myself into it; I project myself there as a tiny figure, seated on a block of ice, abandoned forever. "I'm cold," the lover says, "let's go back"; but there is no road, no way, the boat is wrecked. There is a *coldness* particular to the lover, the chilliness of the child (or of any young animal) that needs maternal warmth.
>
> —Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*

This chapter's second epigraph comes from the section entitled "Images" in *A Lover's Discourse* where Barthes reflects on a kind of amorous wounding that the headnote describes as "inflicted more often by what one sees than by what one knows."[1] He characterizes the image as "cruel" in its prohibitive autonomy, "down to the last finicky detail": "The definition of the image, of any image: that from which I am excluded."[2] Perceptual exclusion gives way to low-grade romantic pain, as when "leaving the outdoor café where I must *leave behind* the other with friends, *I see myself* walking away alone, shoulders bowed, down the empty street."[3] The fading away of the breakup scene has the effect of decreasing both the circumstances and the anguished reporting of them—there is nothing to be known here, and nothing to be seen—but what does such heartache teach about a world that one would like to take leave from?

Barthes's "sad image" of the lover walking off *in medias res* offers a queer gloss on a romanticism that dwells with a world left unfulfilled, unfinished, and last. "The image is peremptory, it always has the last word; no knowledge can contradict it, 'arrange' it, refine it": What the image irreversibly *says*, as it were, coincides with an end of saying, arranging, and refining; it inhumanly exists as a last thing, quite apart from our fantastic desire to perceive it.[4] It is no longer in a responsive relationship with us. In this way, the image presents itself as beyond appearance and signification—the lastness of a world and one's unimaginable absence from it. To further illustrate this point, Barthes offers another sad romantic image in the paragraph that follows: Caspar

David Friedrich's *The Polar Sea* (Plate 3), a work that, like the notoriously invisible Winter Garden photograph of Barthes's mother in *Camera Lucida* (itself an instance of photography's "last music"), is not shown in the text.[5] It is as if Barthes wants to insist here that a world simply cannot (and must not) be made to be seen under the icy circumstances he describes: While the glacial architecture of the painting sets up a traditional scene of sublimity, challenging the imagination with a seemingly unconquerable prospect, it is also a zero-degree void. There is an erotics of abandonment, however, through visual unavailability: Barthes's lover finds himself in a zone like the one Coleridge's Mariner enters, one where "the Ice was all between./The Ice was here, the Ice was there,/The Ice was all around:/It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd—/Like noises of a swound."[6] In this last world, the ice simply will not thaw: At once infinite and delimited, it is both *here* and *there*, a "between" space or interval that has "no man, no object . . . no road, no way."

Friedrich's painting exploits this kind of representational prohibition, depicting something that is not there but is still alluded to in its double title: an older lost painting called *A Wrecked Ship off the Coast of Greenland in the Moonlight*. That missing work becomes part of the painting's unfinished status, and its multiple titles hint at the denotative uncertainty about what we are supposed to be seeing.[7] But even more, it is important to emphasize that Friedrich paints an event that never happened: the shipwreck of William Parry's HMS Griper during his expedition to locate the Northwest Passage. This suppositional scene is not simply a counterfactual fantasy in *The Polar Sea* but rather a way of painting the inhibition *of* an inhibition. In other words, it does not try to imagine what might have been (i.e., a spectacle of a shipwreck that never was) but rather imagines a nothingness or nonevent, a path never taken and stillborn in the materiality of the painting. What we most immediately do see is a kind of jagged composite or assemblage: a ship coyly peering out from the ice on the right side of the painting, falling westward in the gravitational pull, as colossal shards of ice and snow are stacked against and beside each other—a heap doubled by the iceberg that rhymes with it in the far left-hand corner. Friedrich's impossible ice-world is a realm of last things, disposed for inspection like commodity forms but not requiring thought to act upon them. Closed off, *The Polar Sea* does not invite sympathies: It renders to view what it simultaneously forbids.

Within this ice-world, Friedrich paints with and through historical ruination, dwelling in the disaster of an unfinished space where change does not translate into legibility. Norbert Wolff speculates that Friedrich's evocation of a "catastrophe on an epochal scale" displays his resistance to the "'political

winter' gripping Germany under Metternich," but the painting is not quite a work of protest against things as they are.[8] After all, the image of a ruined world does not so much intervene as demolish the very notion of "world" as a container within which any dispute is set to happen. In Maurice Blanchot's terms, Friedrich's disaster is "not advent. . . . It does not happen."[9] In this way, saying that one sees too much or sees too little misses the point of what is happening here. When the chips are down, everything stays untouched but thinking itself is damaged. When Barthes cites the painting again in his lectures on the neutral, it appears as an example of satori; "Satori doesn't enlighten anything. . . . [It is] a kind of mental catastrophe that occurs in a single blow."[10]

In this chapter, I begin with Barthes's meditation on Friedrich as a prelude to Wordsworth's thinking about the intersections between a world, its end, and a nonworld throughout his poetry. Frequently, Wordsworth imagines himself with, inside, or outside a world that may or may not exist, even as his own self turns inward or turns away. If we make claims about something being a world—and let us recall that we sometimes use *world* as a way station term that resembles but also differs from *earth*, *globe*, or *planet*—the presumption is that the concept of the world is answerable to our desires to participate in something much larger that shelters us. In *The Human Condition*, for example, Hannah Arendt writes: "To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time."[11] In a similar vein of argument, Kaja Silverman, in her own Arendtian book *World Spectators*, remarks: "We are only really in the world when it is in us—when we have made room within our psyches for it to dwell and expand."[12] What I want to argue is this: Claims about working to make a world or inviting it within us at times prevent thinking about the unfinishedness of a world, as well as what would happen if it conceptually lapsed. If the world is something that we "interpret and give meaning to . . . relate to or feel alienated from," then in that dynamic lies the need to reflect on *world* as something unknowable, glimpsed at its last word just as it leaves us behind like Barthes walking away from the café.[13]

To accept the world too readily is to write and rewrite it as the master-figure that naturalizes the intermittence and erasure of the inscriptive. It might appear counterintuitive to read Wordsworth as a poet of the unfinished world, especially after William Hazlitt's sobering observation that "he tolerates only what he himself creates; he sympathizes only with what can enter into no competition with him, with 'the bare trees and mountains bare,

and grass in the green field.' He sees nothing but himself and the universe."[14] To be sure, Wordsworth emphatically recommends the world in many places, and often enough to make any counterargument seem improbable: "the very world which is the world/Of all of us, the place on which, in the end,/We find our happiness, or not at all."[15] And he is the poet whose "*voice proclaims/How exquisitely the individual Mind/(And the progressive powers perhaps no less/Of the whole species) to the external World/Is fitted:—and how exquisitely, too,/Theme this but little heard of among Men,/The external World is fitted to the Mind*" ("Prospectus to *The Recluse*," 63–68).[16] It is as if Wordsworth is a stern adherent to what Quentin Meillassoux has called the impasse of "correlationism," or the problem of only having "access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other."[17] But even in the lines "*the place on which, in the end,/We find our happiness, or not at all*," the *not at all*, like the *now no more*, recursively depletes the thought that precedes it; indeed, the words sound like a sotto voce act of doubt passed over the existence of that very place and our happiness in it, as if wondering out loud whether happiness bears any kind of empirical value for assessing the evidence of a world. Wordsworth thus often departs, with much ambivalence, from the "fittings" he proclaims—to fit something is to fix, adjust, and measure, but "fit" also invites us to hear its other meaning—a disruption. Attending to such lapses lets us read the world as a stumbling, unfinished thing that is always last: It disappears just as we most think we are in it or of it. Like the *now no more*, it is a theoretical splinter or a "form of the unfinished," a term I borrow from Balachandra Rajan to denote a formal "avoidance of closure . . . [a] poetics of . . . partial inscription" that "carries with it no natural citizenship, no whole from which it was disinherited, or from which its incompleteness has been made to proceed."[18] To *unfinish* means to leave something undone but not incomplete, to endlessly set aside without a larger governing shape or context. The unfinished is indifferent to the renovating projects of the Enlightenment that putatively establish the subject's relation to a world it endorses as its own.[19] Thus unlike other aesthetic figures like a fragment, a torso, or a ruin, the unfinished, Rajan writes, "is based on contestation, or upon a movement of deferral, initially arising out of contestation, but capable of being uncoupled from that engagement."[20] The unfinished wants less and needs less to accomplish its acts of refusal. It contests its own tension toward nothingness, as if even the mere gesture of appurtenance to some other kind of "engagement," however empty or nonrelational, were itself an unavoidably sentimental byproduct of a rapport that an unfinished world desists from. The unfinished always ends, repeatedly and compulsively, a world as we know it.

Our nonconsensual relation to the unfinished world constantly surprises us. It is a world *less* or *less than one* and nothing more, and although it is not *nothing*, it has nothing to say.[21] What if we were to allow for thoughts to exist without a world, without a thinker, and without a life?[22] A radical worldlessness, perhaps, that is not at all like the kind Arendt identifies with totalitarianism and the abolition of belonging or the one that Heidegger equates with deprivation and impoverishment.[23] In these two philosophical cases, the world endures as a necessary concept of attachment. The unfinished world, by contrast, would be impressive and impressed upon but not palpable and sensible; it would be radically passive in its self-surrender as an object of forensic knowledge. Instead of being this or that, the world is something inapprehensible, untidily disorienting, and exposed like a spot of time *en plein air*:

> . . . forthwith I left the spot
> And, reascending the bare common, saw
> A naked Pool that lay beneath the hills,
> The Beacon on the summit, and more near
> A Girl who bore a pitcher on her head
> And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
> Against the blowing wind. It was, in truth,
> An ordinary sight; but I should need
> Colours and words that are unknown to man
> To paint the visionary dreariness
> Which, while I looked all round for my lost Guide,
> Did at that time invest the naked Pool,
> The Beacon on the lonely Eminence,
> The Woman, and her garments vexed and tossed
> By the strong wind.
>
> (*The Prelude*, 11: 302–16)

In this passage, the "ordinary sight" marks a spot of nonequivalence or a negativity within history that cannot be accounted for.[24] The spot of time is often made to exceptionally stand apart in Wordsworth, as a memory tag or point of intense saturation, at once affectively excessive and implosive, but it is also the case that the spot is so compelling because, well, it is just *there* like a thickening blot staining the site of an experience that is otherwise meant to be remembered or reaped.[25] The spot's inscrutability lies in that it is ungiven as knowledge: It does not advance into anything beyond itself. Like Friedrich's shipwreck, Wordsworth stages things that are not immediately seen but flicker at the borders of depiction. This is not a poetic still

life but a stilled life the poem cannot organize—a reverse ekphrasis where the picture tries to remember or put itself into words, as if to rearrange the contents of an unfinished world that do not add up to a full image. Such a still life is ruinous and resistant to composure: While it is a "picture of devastation," to use a term from Veena Das, it is less about a crisis of survival in the world than a fragmenting and deletion of it.[26] This is not an enchanted world of becoming, of a multiplicity of forces "marked by surprising turns in time, uncanny experiences, and the possibility of human participation."[27] Wordsworth's spot, like a smudge, is "not advent" not only in its spatial coordinates but temporally and affectively, too: It is a time one cannot have or feel. The "visionary dreariness" that "struggles to define" itself is less phenomenological grime or emotional uncertainty than a material swathe or coating that is brushed over the various inoperative things scattered in the episode—the waste, pool, beacon, and the girl with the pitcher.[28] All of these seem *of* a world: They are singular and relational, multiplying like a Damien Hirst spot painting, arranged but converging and excessive. But at the same time, they are phenomena that do not link up to each other with any kind of coherence. They are spots of unfinishing, unworking, and disuse: They cannot be nailed down to a world that simply is not there as a milieu or canvas to hold them.

In *Apocalypse-Cinema*, Peter Szendy describes how cinema often strives to achieve an incineration of the gaze, a destruction fantasy of sight or "cineruption" that coincides with the medium's own technological and aesthetic desires for limit-images of the visual: "Cinders signify, they *cinefy*, if I may say so, the lack of any *home* to which one might return. In other words the absence of reversal, of *katastrophē*."[29] Szendy uses as an example the final scene of Roberto Rossellini's *Stromboli*, where Ingrid Bergman leaves the volcanic island amid a storm of fumes and ash. "These ashes filmed by Rossellini in 1950 do not seem to be appropriated by anyone," which is to say that they spew up as unintentional images that are not beholden to any gaze at all.[30] Similarly, Wordsworth's dreariness is not psychological but rather a cineruption that cannot accommodate any one point of view—it is a version of something like the gleam in "Peele Castle" that Paul Fry describes as evoking "the underlying unfeelingness of the earth . . . strip[ping] away the pathetic fallacy" of the image by reducing it to its finish.[31] And while the image might have "allure," any connectedness here is a false positive.[32] "Dreariness" is a lure of a world without us that still wants to be impossibly looked at, but otherwise; it is as if the world were not the correlate of any human desire at all but an elusive consequence or symptom of something already not there to even forget—a scattered last

thing. "Contrary to those puzzle drawings," Barthes muses, "in which the hunter is secretly figured in the confusion of the foliage, I am not in the scene."[33] In the unfinished world of a puzzle, one is not quite sure where one should be: As anyone who works with puzzles knows, the missing piece is always the last; it keeps us from reassembling a representation of a world we cannot ever fully witness.

Pausing In-Between

> As one who in his journey baits at noon,
> Though bent on speed, so here the archangel paused
> Betwixt the world destroyed and world restored,
> If Adam aught perhaps might interpose;
> Then with transition sweet new speech resumes.
> Thus thou hast seen one world begin and end;
> And man as from a second stock proceed.
> Much thou hast yet to see, but I perceive
> Thy mortal sight to fail; objects divine
> Must needs impair and weary human sense:
> Henceforth what is to come I will relate,
> Thou therefore give due audience, and attend.[34]

Michael's insistence that Adam has not yet seen much is interesting. As if freed up momentarily at lunchtime, the archangel curates two worlds, and because he knows his time is not all that free in this interval, he realizes exactly when to stop for an interposition.[35] In this "pause of symmetry" between a world destroyed and a world restored in *Paradise Lost*—a canny repetition of a pattern of the middle that Milton returns to throughout his epic[36]—it is not hard to hear Walter Benjamin's messianic remark that the "past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth."[37] At the crossroads of historical and eternal time, the spot is where Michael's immortality transcends but also coincides with Adam's finitude—an overlap that construes an inhuman relay of histories (angelic, mortal) multiplied out of divergent, nonlinear timelines. Too readily, Michael walks an apocalyptic tightrope between a world that has ended and another, more redeeming one, tracking a spot in the narrative where the briefest point of change is held in suspended animation.[38] At this site, an unraveling occurs, perhaps similar to what Giorgio Agamben calls, after Benjamin, a kairological seizure of a temporal moment—a time that

subsists in the difference between chronological time and the end of time, which is to say: time *as* remnant or unfinished—*last time*.[39]

Michael's pause, however, evokes a different kind of intransigence: He does not quite straddle a *kairos* so much as figure for the duration of that spot where world/nonworld persists—where the last curiously endures. It is as if he is a placeholder for doubt or caution over the project of world-change or world-making, a vigilant figure that presides over what T. J. Clark luminously limns as "the world . . . waiting to display itself all in one piece," delaying the world's unpreparedness, its illegible gaps, holes, or spots.[40] Michael's pause works less to determine whether there may or may not be any potentiality between worlds and even less at monitoring a transfer of power from destruction to renewal. Instead, he is stalled at the intermundia of the two, their *and-ness*, as it were—the unfinished, less-than and more-than void that is not defined by any part to whole, background to foreground, or by any history to inherit and reclaim.[41]

What if Milton were imagining the unfinishedness of a spot of time avant la lettre, glimpsing an eventless or rootless interval where something like the lessness of the world—a nonworld—can be theoretically looked at but not held onto? This would be a negation of a negation (the nonevent), the in-between of worlds destroyed and restored, presented as open-ended and provisional—a *kinda* world in Eve Sedgwick's playfully slangy observation about the efficacy of queer performativity: "kinda subversive, kinda hegemonic." While Sedgwick's phrase is intended to be critical, there is something meaningfully unfinished about her use of "kinda": It is about the partiality of perception, a world that is improperly neither this nor that, just kinda.[42] And like Kant's negative attentiveness, it makes a mess of the logic of the pair it otherwise tries to rhetorically sustain. How can one think or know that one has experienced such a world? After all, it presents itself as a thing that is *not-one's-own*, subject to no legible determinations.[43] Instead of development, we are left to wonder what would occur if this *kinda* intermundia lingered as the last, and without changeover. It would also take Adam's interposition as a drag on thought, a *pas-au delà*, rather than an attempt at advancement.[44]

The epic assumes that Michael's pedagogical dialogue with Adam should be a release from the grip of the intermundia, a way of dialoguing with that very vacancy. But mortal sight momentarily fails just as Michael inaugurates the final book that C. S. Lewis notoriously described as the poem's "untransmuted lump of futurity."[45] Eyes strain to look at this queer lump that materially snags the book's anticipation of a world restored to sight. After all, the lump refuses to move, see, or think, just like Heidegger's stone

that "is worldless, it is without world, it has no world. . . . [It] *cannot even be deprived* of something like world" because, unlike a lizard on a stone, the stone does not touch or come into any relation with what is beneath or around it.[46] If Wordsworth gave us spots, Milton's lump (at least for Lewis) is a heavy weight that cannot translate itself for future readers. Writing on the radical meaninglessness of philology, the positing of language as a non-knowledge, Werner Hamacher offers up the image of a stone for this kind of philological monadism: The stone is just like works that "say everything and mean nothing" and "have no outside to which they refer; they contract the world into themselves. As one says of a stone that it is contracted matter, so are they contracted world." In this austere scene, the stoniness of the text demolishes readable worlds—it deprives deprivation itself as the alibi for relating, interpreting, and referring to "another world." Such texts are nontexts or nonworlds that speak, but not for us and without referential claims; they "are not closed and shut off: they also speak—since they say everything—for others and for other times, but they do not denote them, claim no knowledge of them and none of themselves."[47] Profoundly involuted but not inward, these contracted worlds have no legible outside. They figure the "no future" of philology.[48]

For Wordsworth, as for Milton, there are always obstacles on the road and in the city that present intractable worlds. Take these two well-known passages:

> And once, far travelled in such mood, beyond
> The reach of common indications, lost
> Amid the moving pageant, 'twas my chance
> Abruptly to be smitten with the view
> Of a blind Beggar, who, with upright face
> Stood propped against a Wall, upon his Chest
> Wearing a written paper, to explain
> The Story of the Man and who he was;
> My mind did at this spectacle turn round
> As with the might of waters, and it seemed
> To me that in this Label was a type
> Or emblem of the utmost that we know
> Both of ourselves, and of the universe;
> And on the shape of this unmoving Man,
> His fixèd face and sightless eye, I looked
> As if admonished from another world.
>
> (*The Prelude*, 7: 608–23)

—I asked him whither he was bound, and what
The object of his journey; he replied
"Sir! I am going many miles to take
A last leave of my son, a mariner,
Who from a sea-fight has been brought to Falmouth,
And there is dying in an hospital."

("Old Man Travelling," 15–20)

In these verses, where does the end of the world appear? Is it at the end of the poem, at the end of the line, or an end in the midst of things? Adam Potkay glosses the blind beggar episode thus: "The end of Wordsworth's paragraph—which is also the end of his world—arrives with two unsettled and unsettling questions: admonished to do or refrain from doing *what*, and from *what* other world?"[49] Something like a world punctually ends in this passage, but the words are also tonally restrained, holding back something in that encounter, as if the whole apparatus for understanding this image—the beggar, the text, the poet, and the poem itself—was an experiment with the pressures of inhibition that the episode occasions. In this contracted world, a line like "The Story of the Man and who he was" is a perfunctory, constative notation of what Neil Hertz diagrams as an "end of the line" structure or a moment of blockage: "What one is drawn to is not a clearly oriented reflection, a *mise en abyme* of the artist's representational project, but an engagement with the act and with the medium of . . . writing condensed almost to the point of nonreflective opacity."[50] The dislocation occasioned by this sight—"My mind did at this spectacle turn round/As with the might of waters"—pauses on the label as the "utmost" that says nothing and that cannot be seen or read by the beggar. These are certainly a form or genre of last words, but they also form a textual image of the last in its abbreviated form, offering less a memorable write-up on the beggar than an image at once condensed and unfinished—a scrap of a life.[51] The episode thus reads like a weirdly illegible spot or tear in the poem that shifts the mind away from anything as conclusive and englobing as a world. Admonishment sounds less like a call to duty than a rebuke that keeps Wordsworth, Orpheus-like, from looking beyond the line at anything except a world in its retreat. And in the second verse selection, "Old Man Travelling," the man's declaration that he travels to "take/A last leave" reverses the Orphic structure: He hopes to act upon, to finally see, what his own words so poignantly cut off—a world so personalized at this lyric precipice that it becomes impossible to see and access. It is a snippet of itself, an intensified, "uncontained" midst or "indefinite and ungraspable beginning and end"[52] that further extirpates

any interiority from the man's reply and moors the poem at a swollen point without transfer, affect, and movement.[53] In its brevity, the reply sounds like a generic and depleted communication: The man can only reply by abbreviating or unfinishing the wishfulness of his words, a wishfulness that will not resolve itself beyond the poem's bounds. This is an experience of something that shutters a world that has no place for more inwardness. The end of "Old Man Travelling" in part plays out, I think, what Agamben calls the "end of the poem": If poetry is minimally defined by enjambment and the poem's end marks the impossibility of a final enjambment, something else occurs with the last line as it "collapses into silence, so to speak, in an endless falling."[54] At this spot of collapse, Agamben reads language dwelling with itself in another fashion, another philology that depotentializes the poem and speaks to no one. In this silence, the poem's "strategy" is unveiled: "to let language finally communicate itself, without remaining unsaid in what is said."[55] For Wordsworth, however, his poem's end was difficult to metabolize: In the 1798 version of the poem, the man's reply hung between quotation marks that were then subsequently deleted in the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, followed by the quote's entire elimination from the 1815 edition. One sees how far Wordsworth wrestled with the question of how to bear or not bear this burdensome spot in an unfinished world.

Less Than, More Than

Gaston argues that Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, emerges as the primary thinker of philosophy without a world: "The problem of world arises when one begins to think about the world *as a whole*," principally because we have no way of experiencing such wholeness in the first place.[56] Traditionally, "world" requires containment, discretion, and separation from something else in order to constitute an enclosed totality. It can only have meaning by way of exclusion. For this reason, Kant conceives the world as a regulative idea: It "does not delineate the form and substance of the sensible and intelligible world. Rather it reveals something that operates without the world as an object . . . the regulative world withholds *the world itself* as both a secure object of experience and a platform for some form of the internal objectivity for the self. . . . This reticence around the concept of world, this refusal *to give the world* to the self, is perhaps Kant's finest achievement."[57] The self cannot give itself a world; to do so would presume that selfhood is impermeably sovereign and bounded, and one consequence of that presumption is that we take the world to be a totalized, and totalizing, concept that accommodates the human, offering habitation and place.

If we follow Kant, to have or not have a world are one and the same claim, each underwritten by a possessive structure of knowledge. By contrast, let us keep thinking otherwise about a last, messy, unfinished world that may be nowhere at all. "There is no world, not even a world," writes Derrida, "not even one and the same world, no world that is one: *the* world, *a* world, a world that is *one*, is what there is not."[58] *The*, *a*, *same*, *no*, and *one*: Each word approaches and deictically tries to specify something about "world," and yet, the grammatical act here infinitely points and pushes the object further and further away—the "world" is not said *for* anyone or anything; it is never a matter of being *for x* at all.[59] Derrida tactfully hints that, while there is no world, the question of how (and how not) to write and read about a world is always a matter of dislocation and disinterest—about a world that is unfinished, impersonal, one that is not seen or felt, *a* world glimpsed partially in the midst of its own recession.[60] One cannot make a firm claim on the world (even as one struggles to be within it) because a claim is a risk, a gambit, an open gesture. A claim is always the passive form of its own not having something—a letting go. Groundlessness, lifelessness, worldlessness: Without any of these, we cannot be, and yet with all of these we also cannot be. In his essay "Rams," Jacques Derrida, citing Paul Celan, writes: "When the world is no more, when it is on the way to being no longer *here but over there*, when the world is no longer near, when it is no longer right *here* (*da*), but over there (*fort*), when it is no longer even present there (*da*) but gone far away (*fort*), perhaps infinitely inaccessible, then I must carry *you*, you alone, you alone in me or on me alone."[61] Ethics takes place for Derrida when a world passes from sight and a life passes away; one does not begin to think ethically because one needs to do something, as if to fill in and care for the remains of persons and things after the end; rather, ethics takes place *because* everything, including the ethical, is already now no more. Every ideology, concept, or desire is marked by its own ending, and in that granular difference, "in defiance of arithmetic," the "end of the world" abolishes global certainties that were never there to begin with. "Not *only one* end among others, the end of someone or of something *in the world*, the end of a life or of a living being . . . the end of the unique world, the end of the totality of what is or can be presented as the origin of the world for any unique living being, be it human or not."[62] For Derrida, death gives one name to the formal enactment of finality, again and again, sometimes quietly and weightlessly; it enjoins us to attend to the end of the world, not only the other's end but the end of *the world* each and every time. The world *as* disastrous form always ends with each death because there is no such thing as a total world, no metaphoric sum of all parts or catchall entity

that stands on its own. Before picturing how to bear the other after the end, Derrida acknowledges something even prior to that responsibility, a demand that is originary and impossible to indicate: "Isn't this retreat of the world, this distancing by which the world retreats to the point of the possibility of its annihilation . . . also the most insane experience?"[63] Here, as if from a place where we are not, we are admonished to contemplate worldlessness as a falling back that repeats lastness, over and over.

What does it mean to let go of a world even when one thinks one has it? In a passage from *The Pedlar*, Wordsworth writes:

> He had a world about him—'twas his own,
> He made it—for it only lived to him
> And to God who looked into his mind.
> Such sympathies would often bear him far
> In outward gesture, and in visible look,
> Beyond the common seeming mankind.
> Some called it madness—such it might have been,
> But that he had an eye which evermore
> Looked deep into the shades of difference
> As they lie hid in all exterior forms,
> Which from a stone, a tree, a withered leaf,
> To the broad ocean and the azure heavens
> Spangled with kindred multitude of stars,
> Could find no surface where its power might sleep,
> Which spake perpetual logic to his soul,
> And by an unrelenting agency
> Did bind his feelings even as in a chain.[64]

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche describes the last human as making an earth that has "become small, and on it hops the last human being, who makes everything small. His kind is ineradicable, like the flea beetle; the last human being lives longest."[65] The last human's frugality or moderate living is one source for Zarathustra's contempt: He who lives the longest does so under bare conditions where the world is reduced to a manageable circuit of relations. This image of a small, last earth interests me: Nietzsche sees it as a fragmented thing, not simply an earth diminished but a thing that has no totality, no context. The last human is ineradicable not because he is quick-witted but because the fantasy of annihilation has itself been curtailed: In this spare setting, there is no more *world* left in the "end-of-the-world." If Wordsworth's pedlar, unlike Heidegger's stones or nonhuman animals, has a world in the sense that he has access to being, that accessibility, at this point

in the poem, appears severely compromised. "His own" marks a minimal claim or aspiration: to hold onto a state of bare subsistence even under squandered conditions.[66] But in another Nietzschean way, the pedlar does make a world out of the remnants that "bear him far/In outward gesture." He mechanically gleans the unfinished world, parsing it through the lens of a littleness that is always less than more and less than one. Like Deleuze and Guattari's Australian rainforest bird who "carves out a territory and constructs a house," the pedlar "constructs a stage . . . like a ready-made" amid his discrete things.[67] Staging produces ready-mades that operate in a way that is different from their given functions. The pedlar's staging does not try to force an interdependence of the human to thing, mind to world; he undertakes instead a work of deletion, a lessening of world-making in a context where his life is one line of flight among others. There is something of Locke's "microscopic eye" in the pedlar's look, frugally pondering the distressing magnifications of sense impressions.[68] But the pedlar seems to stay with the world while simultaneously working to accomplish an exit from it—what Catherine Malabou calls the "impossibility of flight where flight presents the only possible solution."[69] The things he sees do not add up to a better world, no world, or a better self but to an exemption from those very choices—the staging of an unadorned world that is looked upon at last sight.

Perhaps this world is conceptually too much to take. But too much of what? And would it be better were it smaller, larger, grander, more than, less than, or just enough?[70] The following sonnet asks just that:

> The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
> Little we see in Nature that is ours;
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
> This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
> The Winds that will be howling at all hours
> And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
> For this, for every thing, we are out of tune;
> It moves us not—Great God! I'd rather be
> A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
> So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
> Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
> Have sight of Proteus coming from the sea;
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.
>
> ("The World Is Too Much with Us," 1–14)

On the surface, the sonnet pits the past against a present world that confronts a historic depletion of resources, and it laments its own belatedness to the industrialized crisis it has come to inhabit. Indeed, the assertion of the first line evokes a revelation that has all the settlement of a fact: The world is more than what is (or should be) given to us; it gives out too much of something that otherwise eludes minds exhausted by an economy of exchange and ceaseless dispensation. The sonnet condenses the speaker's thoughts into a compact circuit, as if to understand why, if there is too much of something, too little will not do either.[71] A first question to ask is this: Out of where did such a world emerge? How do we trace its sudden appearance? Pressed up to the world like a face against the window, we read the sonnet not fully knowing where we are, as if surprised even to think of something like a world suddenly rearing itself into view like a startled animal.

In its unique smallness, Wordsworth's sonnet accomplishes an inverted sublimity: "When we push our discoveries yet downward," writes Edmund Burke, "and consider those creatures so many degrees yet smaller, and the still diminishing scale of existence, in tracing which the imagination is lost as well as the sense, we become amazed and confounded at the wonders of minuteness."[72] But sublimity aggrandizes what comes across in the poem as exhaustion over the superfluity of greatness, scale, mediation, and measurement. The world's too muchness is a hyper-magnification of itself—it boasts its own immeasurability, wanting to be more than it could ever be, or needs to be, for us. Like the boy Leo's homemade viewfinder trained at the planet Melancholia in Lars von Trier's eponymous film, one can think of the sonnet as a buckling frame following a world it cannot formally bring to sight—a world that is deceptively excessive, bulging, and unframeable. On an earth that is, for Shaftesbury, a "mansion globe, this man container," both world and man teeter on the brink of explosion.[73]

If we are presumably *with* a world in "The World Is Too Much with Us," we are in a relation *to* the prepositional relationality of *with*: In other words, we are unavoidably with *withness*. We destructively share with, accommodate, and divide a world that, in being with us, also is inside us, outside of us, in the midst of us, and nowhere at all around us. Withness displaces, transfers, and disconnects alliances; it inscribes a difference *with* rather than an alignment among things. "*World* means at least *being-to* or *being-toward* [*être-là*]," writes Jean-Luc Nancy; "it means rapport, relation, address, sending, donation, presentation *to*."[74] The sea "that bares her bosom to the moon" and the "Winds that will be howling at all hours,/And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers" are neither tributes nor sacrifices but acts of exposure of and to the unfinished world in the absence of any moral profit. These tropes

both mediate and expose themselves to their own media or mediations. Kevis Goodman reminds us that eighteenth-century explorations of poetic media in the hands of writers like Addison were as much about "the vertiginous dissolution of that middle distance . . . the disturbance of sense-perception, or the disclosure of a heterogeneity within writing" that evinced sensory dislocations pushing up against the sheen of language like "a rough bearing from within a smooth wheel."[75] The sonnet's gesture of exposure might thus be read as similarly addressing a world while also letting go of the medium of address—as if addressing *address*. To be "out of tune" does not merely say that we are out of sync with something to which we should be synced but that we are, like Aeolian harps, not vibrant matter. We are not media or materialities for any use at all.[76]

Wordsworth's sonnet registers fatigue and disbelief over the world's (im)mediacy: It cannot be made into a medium, it cannot serve as a starting point for meaning, it cannot be a totalizing fulcrum—and yet, something is still glimpsed. In a world that is given away just as it is spent, the world gives only to be taken, "late and soon," industrialized, globalized, and urbanized as a commodity of posterity—the future anterior *thing* that founds humanity's illusory "getting and spending" of the world-as-ground. The dream of a common world, whether it is called "common life" and "common language," as Wordsworth does in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, or if it is Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's notion of the commonwealth, might be one kind of neutralization of the "evermore about to be," transmuting it into something other than the expectation of more exploitation-to-come. The future common would be on the side of lessness and connectedness, harmony, and solidarity in the abandonment of possession.[77] Along these lines, to "lay waste our powers," while referring, on the one hand, to the careless ruin of human potentiality, might also be read as an attempt to parry the world's extravagance and our corollary need to suffer it as a measure of heroic endurance—what Anne-Lise François describes as a counter-Enlightenment ethics and aesthetics of restraint and passivity.[78] But I would also add that the sonnet might be implying a laying waste to those powers usually directed at sustaining the world as a trope for connectivity and rapport, a thing that holds other things together even if it is wholly impossible to know. Might we make waste of *the world*, turn it into an "ordinary sight"? Why do we think that it is impossible to imagine that the world was *never* something?

These questions perturb precisely because they imply a world without thinkers, and "The World Is Too Much with Us," I suggest, traces the risks of this kind of reflection. *The* world has always been here, Wordsworth asserts, because it is also not here for us. The "Little we see in Nature that is ours"

mixes pathos with stern assertion: As the phrase laments our inconsequence to (our abridgment from) the natural world, it also soberly accepts nature's resistance to even the most mildly appropriative gestures of human acknowledgment. While Wordsworth's critique of disenchantment and estrangement dreams up a preferred "pagan" life "suckled in a creed outworn," the creed is an outdated statement, a has-been doxa, but in the sonnet, it also achieves something paradoxically more durable. It is an anachronistic, faithless faith, outliving what it was meant to say and inscribe because the creed, by virtue of being now superfluous to this lived world, historically neutralized and unfinished, is all the more seductive: It is released from dogmatism into the wondrous inefficiency—the inhumanity—of pure philology. Thus, the creed is less about Wordsworth's sympathy with an atavistic world and more about his reflection on the recalcitrances, regressions, and withdrawals within thinking—outworn and unfinished thoughts in the midst of the world to which we do not have a right and that do not themselves contribute to further spiritualizing that right itself. Wordsworth does not enter another older world to watch "Proteus coming from the sea" or to hear "old Triton blow his wreathed horn"; his perspective is not directed at a world of reciprocal meanings, nor is it one where things are done otherwise, better, or just differently. Like Friedrich committing the imaginary shipwreck of Parry's expedition to his canvas, Wordsworth dreams of an unfinished nonworld where the difference between what should be done for us and what should be done *by* us is indiscernible and "outworn."

Close-Ups of a Planet

The more we turn to the world in order to bring it back to life, the more we continue to forget that it will not help us get to where we thought we wanted to go. The world goes nowhere. It is a commonplace to say that as a concept, it has been just as much contested as deployed in a variety of theoretical approaches and fields of scholarship that return to it as their main object. "I will call the *world* a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read," writes Keats in a letter, "I will call the *human heart* the *horn Book* used in that School—and I will call the *Child able to read*, *the Soul* made from that *school* and its *hornbook*. Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?"[79] I will call the world . . . something else. I am reminded of Hannah Arendt's statement: "The essence of education is natality, the fact that human beings are *born* into the world."[80] If this is the essence of the teachable world, a "vale of Soul-making,"[81] it is also the case that natality—our being born into a

world—is utterly unthinkable and unteachable: We are born into a scene of "education" by a world we cannot remember ever entering. And how exactly does one even "enter" a world? Might our education be a series of infinite exits?[82] Keats's world-as-schoolhouse is the space where learning and unlearning the world can occur, but it is just as clear that it is the space of an amnesia, a forgetfulness about the world-as-school—the regulative idea teaching others about its tenuous regulations. What happens when thought unravels in such a world without us being there (or anywhere) to think it?

If the unthought of education is the oblivion of the world, what does one learn from it? One sits, reads, looks, thinks, and acts upon it as something that might be subject to destruction just as easily as it might be preserved.[83] But to institute the world (as Keats does) is to enshrine something, as if one were bearing it forth, an endpoint sought by means of common commitments and actions. In *What Is a World?* Pheng Cheah approvingly cites Goethe's remarks that the concept of a world literature inaugurates projects of movement and communication that have the merit of distinguishing worldliness from globalization: "The world in the higher sense is spiritual intercourse, transaction, and exchange aimed at bringing out universal humanity. It does not abolish national differences but takes place and is to be found in the intervals, mediations, passages, and crossings between national borders. The world is thus a form of relating, belonging, or being-with. In contradistinction, the globe—the thing produced by processes of globalization—is a bounded object or entity in Mercatorian space."[84] "Following Goethe," Cheah continues, "we should conceive of the world not only as a spatio-geographical entity but also as an ongoing dynamic process of becoming, something that possesses a historical-temporal dimension and hence is continually made and remade."[85] To "belong otherwise, in different ways" promises practices of relationality at the scale of the intersubjective—the world will always school us.[86] Cheah does insist, however, that it is the inhuman world that literature is especially capable of accessing over and above arguments of cross-national intellectual transactions and exchanges, as well as more materially determined definitions of worlding based on movements of capital or globalization: "Literature exemplifies the undecidability that opens a world."[87] But what if literature were not about opening but closing or exiting, what J. Hillis Miller calls unglobing—the marking out of dissent, exclusion, and disengagement that disfigures the world?[88] To take another example from Keats: When Lycius looks into Lamia's eyes and sees himself "mirror'd small in paradise," he addresses her as "My silver planet, both of eve and morn!"[89] Commenting on the trope of the "silver planet" in the context of early nineteenth-century lyric commodity culture, Daniel Tiffany describes it as "poetic kitsch," de-

veloped by Keats in the face of an emerging bourgeois concept of literature. Keats's silver, Tiffany argues (as Venus, silveriness, moonlight, starlight, lamplight), "hover[s] between radiance and mass, agency and objecthood, medium and thing."[90] Thus when Lycius calls Lamia his "silver planet," he glimpses her reflective superficiality that gives back to Lycius a distorted view of himself in the allure of her eye's paradise where—like Barthes's lover—he is not there. What is at stake is Lamia's planetarity, to cite Gayatri Spivak's formulation: "a species of alterity belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan."[91] As an orientation and attitude, planetarity is not an aboriginal, custodial ethos and behavior but a "mind-set" that requires "education . . . training the imagination": "Planetarity, then, is not quite a dimension, because it cannot authorize itself over against a self-consolidating other."[92] Lamia is erotically inhuman, "belonging to another system," and all the more (dis)inviting. And as a materially made form of otherness, a mixing of particulars and universals, Keats's silver planet is beyond the human scale of sight, smeared (in the German etymological sense of *kitschen*) like grime over the "visionary gleam" of the visual. "How to entangle, trammel up and snare/Your soul in mine, and labyrinth you there/Like the hid scent in an unbudded rose?" (423). Planetarity is not conventionally teachable. It is a hard pedagogy that pushes against the "lump" of the planet, singularly indifferent to the thinkable designs we make upon it, and in a poem like "Lamia," intersubjectivity fails to make coherent the inhuman smears of kitsch's antiaestheticism, its tastelessness, and its lack of seriousness about anything like a world. When Lycius looks at himself in the planetarity of Lamia's eyes, he sees what he cannot quite learn in the abyss of his desire: that loving another teaches nothing at all.

The uneducability of our relationship to the planet appears most explicitly in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*, a film where each character tries to learn something about the legitimacy of his or her world through the foreign planet that will soon destroy it: The father John (Kiefer Sutherland), like his wife Claire (Charlotte Gainsbourg), fears it as an astronomical and domestic catastrophe. Justine (Kirsten Dunst), however, accepts it as a disaster that has already occurred: Her Schopenhauerian depression is the affective correlate (as is the planet itself) of an unfinished knowledge. Melancholia is not a world but a kitschy supporting actor, a trope in a genre that von Trier rigorously unfinishes. The planet's inexplicable movement toward our world is without motivation or destiny, and as a machinic kind of negativity, the planetary here is less an entity than an "incapacity . . . an unforce or an adynamism in language," to quote Kevin McLaughlin, less a privation of force than a chastening resistance or *drive* (*trieb*) that "bears within it the 'not' of

unforce."[93] An unfinished world is thus caught up with the planetary: like a silver planet that gleams in someone's eyes or threatens to crash into our own, a world is always within a midst, a spot that is not a spot, an in-betweenness that does not quite coincide with us but threatens to unfinish everything. One might try to perceive other options besides seeing the world as granting us epistemological resources to think of ourselves as immanent to it, of it, or beyond it.[94]

In his book *In the Dust of This Planet*, Eugene Thacker's horror story about the philosophical dimensions of planetary devastation and extinction, the "Planet" is conceived as a thing that is not for us to bear witness to or exploitatively live with—not because we ecologically subscribe to certain custodial principles, but because it is monstrously unthinkable, a figural deletion or "remainder" to which human thought is utterly inconsequential:

> In a literal sense the Planet moves beyond the objective World, but it also recedes behind the objective Earth. The Planet is a planet, it is one planet among other planets, moving the scale of things out from the terrestrial into the cosmological framework. Whether the Planet is yet another subjective, idealist construct or whether it can have objectivity and be accounted for as such, is an irresolvable dilemma. What is important in the concept of the Planet is that it remains a negative concept, simply that which remains "after" the human. The Planet can thus be described as impersonal and anonymous.[95]

While the world is implicitly before or *for* humanity, the "Planet" is "a negative concept," residually manifesting itself in the form of a subtraction from what is to that which remains "'after' the human." And as remnant, Thacker's planet also partakes of a "trace-structure" that cannot be substantialized, that cannot accede to presence, however negatively, in that it consists of what is "an always already absent present."[96] The "Planet," then, is not the vestige of something but rather a nontransferable and remaindered spot, the "movement that already carries away the signification it brought," as Levinas describes the trace, an apositional mark of inscription and exclusion that rends "world" and "human" as grounds that also humanize "planet" as a concept.[97] In Thacker's archive, horror gives us a philosophy of the anonymous and the unthinkable, or what Emily Apter terms "planetary dysphoria": "Dysphoria, from the Greek δυσφορος (*dysphoros*), means to endure that which is difficult. It denotes an unpleasant or uncomfortable mood: sadness, a downer moment, anxiety, restlessness, irritability, spleen, manic swings, withdrawal (from addictive cravings), and the total evacuation of euphoria."[98] The world of "World Literature," Apter argues, aggressively obscures the shadow of Thacker's anonymous planet—a certain unthinkability or untranslatability

built into the concept of world, which is otherwise troped as containment, a "reflexive endorsement of cultural equivalence and substitutability."[99] By contrast, the untranslatable is a "deflationary gesture toward the expansionism and gargantuan scale of world-literary endeavors."[100] Less an impasse within translation practices than a brute material resistance to the forward push of translatability itself, the untranslatable world is a remaindered Planet, unreadable in its inscriptive negativity or raw neutrality.

These dysphoric pedagogies seek to disabuse us of thinking *planet*, *earth*, *world*, or any other figure as connective tissue for world-making or as a world that is more than just enough for us.[101] Thacker's "planetary dysphoria" dwells with the unbearable but precisely as a nonpsychological form of thinking that exposes us to the demolition of ethos (custom, place, environment). In his anonymous horror—a kind of Levinasian *il y a*[102]—the Planet is "found" not in a place beyond earth or beyond a solar system but "in the very fissures, lapses, or lacunae in the World and the Earth," which is to say, in their midst as a disfiguration, a nonrelational tear within the normative logic of the world and earth, one that inscribes disaster as imminent to the figures that ostensibly screen against it.[103] As a glimpse of what such dysphoria might be, Thacker turns to literary and philosophical examples; in the Canadian painter Paterson Ewen's *Close Up of a Planet with Three Satellites* (Plate 4), another kind of fissure exposes itself, but in this case, Ewen's work is less after horror than it is committed to an aesthetic that is far more weightless and affectless. At first glance, the painting's enormous, planed plywood surface seems like a blown-up celestial photograph, magnifying its object to the point of rendering it anonymous—a purely exteriorized Planet, the "spot" out of which our reflection originates. Whose close-up is this—Ewen's, a scientist's, or a robot's? The question is important because if it belongs to someone, it must be an implicated gaze, suggesting exactness, certainty, and intention. But what if the gaze were inhuman? *Close Up* tarries with all that might not qualify as the stuff of the humanly "visible," all the negative inconsistences and matters of undertone that are not part of the apparatus of visibility that polices the image.[104] Ewen exploits his painting's frame by insisting that its exclusions are intrinsic to looking, not as value added but as an unintelligibility or avisuality—a planetary lacunae—that fissures the look-as-close-up. "Simultaneously microcosm and macrocosm, the miniature and the gigantic, the close-up," writes Mary Ann Doane, "acts as a nodal point linking the ideologies of intimacy and interiority to public space and the authority of the monumental."[105] As the close-up of a close-up, Ewen removes the painting from a literal "background," the blank space of the wall or floor on which it would be expected to hang or lie, and in

so doing, it is as if he removes and lifts the image away from its indexical capacity, tearing out background and foreground and presenting the painting in its own midst—in other words, the presentation of a fissure or lacunae (after Thacker) of a nonexistent Planet negatively inscribed here within the earth. *Close Up*'s "technical support" (to use Rosalind Krauss's term for the mediating aspect of an artwork) thus works less to sustain its interpretative transmissibility as a painting and more to impoverish it, to eliminate our desire for epistemological access to its obdurate anonymity.[106]

By shredding, incising, cutting, staining, and thickening with layers of muted acrylic and translucent stain the 50 × 77–inch plywood, Ewen performs the task of planet-inscription-as-deletion, physically undoing the "Planet" as a point of orientation, relation, and reference. Three blank "satellites" or knots in the wood, scooped out and painted white, mark filled-in apertures that minimally punctuate the surface, and the flatness of these satellites resembles depthless and gazeless craters. The alternating diagonal tracks of color draw outward and beyond the restricted edges of the painting, as if to the unseen space of the unframed within the frame, its "blind field" of withdrawal and separation.[107] Are these treads, tracks, indents, or sutures? Ewen's colors neither advance nor recede; between each other, they space their in-betweenness, their steps (*pas*) taken but not (*pas*) beyond.[108] Similarly, the large roofing nails, used in building dwellings, are not attached or inserted into the wood but are placed in a discreet configuration, deictically indicating nothing. They hold down something in the materiality of the painting. Lying flat or hung, it is as if Ewen wants to shelter a thought in the flatness of his work, but to shelter it as unknowable. Without exits or roads, *Close Up* intensely forecloses any unstored potentialities within itself, as if to say: This is the image of the Planet as a *thing*, found in the terrestrial spaces of the gallery, the artist's studio, or a residence, but never at home in any of these spaces or fissures. It is an alien, unfinished image of the Planet's last word, inhumanly exposed as a close-up formalizing the invisible visibility within sight.

Hosting Venus

Though joy attend Thee orient at the birth
Of dawn, it cheers the lofty spirit most
To watch thy course when Day-light, fled from earth,
In the grey sky hath left his lingering Ghost,
Perplexed as if between a splendour lost
And splendour slowly mustering. Since the Sun,

> The absolute, the world-absorbing One,
> Relinquished half his empire to the host
> Emboldened by thy guidance, holy Star,
> Holy as princely, who that looks on thee
> Touching, as now, in thy humility
> The mountain-borders of this seat of care,
> Can question that thy countenance is bright,
> Celestial Power, as much with love as light?[109]

This is one of Wordsworth's two sonnets addressed to the planet Venus. Though beginning its orientation at dawn, the evening star's celestial "course" more appropriately coincides with dusk, but its itinerary is not so neatly mapped out by the poem since Wordsworth's planet—from *planasthai*, to wander—perambulates delinquently in and out of frame. He emphasizes the wake of the "grey sky" left by a lingering daylight which mediates a planet that never quite appears, and whatever *it* is, the daylight, like Milton's Michael, traces an intervallic spot of poetic "perplexity," a breach between two splendors or two brightnesses—one lost and another "slowly mustering" that has yet to be fully conscripted into the sky. Figuring looking as an open-ended act without definitive closure, Wordsworth presents Venus as erotically oblique and loitering—a planet paused and held in its evanescence.

The poem builds a blinding, triangulating asymmetry between what Wordsworth sees and solicits and what Venus and Earth solicit from each other—two parallel but distinct lines of sight that implicitly cross but do not overlap. The use of the word *host* here is especially curious: While we are told that the sun has "Relinquished half his empire to the host/Emboldened by [Venus's] guidance," *what* is that host? While it might be "Earth," the image also gestures to the receptivity of hosting, which here is the benefactor of the sun that gives up half his empire—sharing what it separates, or halving and spacing out "empire" as a spacing. What is not clear is if the host compelled this giving up and division of empire, or whether the host merely accepts, without hoarding, what the sun deposes. The precariousness of hosting in Wordsworth's sonnet thus renders hospitable action inhuman, as if imagining a kind of passive hosting or prehosting that blurs the differences between taking and receiving. It is the smallest form of desistance or abdication in a "sky of absence where things happen, or even do not happen."[110]

What remains in a halved empire is a partage that creates just as it separates the planet from earth and world, and the sonnet's address falls somewhere in the in-between spot of the two*:* "bright/ . . . as much with love as light," Venus is lit up, but what it is remains impossible to see. One glimpses the

light, but only partial illumination is afforded, a light that detotalizes celestial bodies by saturating them, figuring them through mediations of light that blur vision. The sonnet suggests that gazing is not reducible to exchange, since to see Venus as the thing that one wants to see is to misread the inhumanness of a planetary gaze with our eyes. If an alien planet helps us triangulate a certain knowledge about our world (i.e., we experience our earth in its distance from the alien planet we barely see), it is because we presume that seeing can give us the "origin and the possibility of the world that only a world can also give";[111] even more, it testifies to our desire to perceive the world *as* originating, as the aboriginal form of seeing that forgets the reflections and surfaces through which origins are copies, things are simulations, worlds are planets, planets are worlds, and worlds are not worlds. At the spot of the most intense and confusing correlationism, the sonnet, like the boy's viewfinder in *Melancholia*, tries to articulate what always exceeds that frame. The planet is unfinished, addressed as a thing that is neither planet nor world but something cinefied—a poem addressing itself through its own fissures.

Cavell remarks that for Kant, the intrinsic ambivalence of skepticism—to both want to know and be disabused from knowing beyond what a world is—defines his brand of philosophic "settlement," which depicts "the human being as living in two worlds, in one of them determined, in the other free."[112] Cavell calls this intrinsic restriction within skepticism Kant's "central idea of limitation": One "romantic" appeal to this two-world model is that it portrays "the human being's dissatisfaction with, as it were, itself"—we "crave [limitation's] comfort and crave escape from its comfort . . . we want unappeasably to be lawfully wedded to the world and at the same time illicitly intimate with it."[113] But Cavell states that there is another kind of appeal that resonates ambivalently in Kant's settlement, "a further insight into whatever that settlement was a settlement of—an insight that the human being now lives in *neither* world, that we are, as it is said, between worlds."[114] If the Planet, for Thacker, is anonymous, for Cavell it is the human's anonymity that is suspended between worlds that limn each other. (Venus's status as the "evening star" also recalls that in early astronomical studies, it was often thought to be the "morning star," the Keatsian silver planet that is not quite itself and often similar to the earth in its dimensions and distance to the sun.) But looking on Venus, we look *through* its elusive inscriptions, like Ewen's *Close Up*. Can it even be a world? It might be closer to something that humbly touches or barely grazes the "seat of care," as if to make light of our planet's extension of ethical acknowledgment. It passively trails and unspools. And what *is* the seat of care? If care must have a place to sit or land, here we have a possibly groundless care. Like hosting, then, care can only seemingly

be effected if it is made to act, to take off; but here, the seat of care pulls care back—or rather, if anything is activated, it touches in "humility," gesturing at something closer to a passive amends. "The mountain-borders of *this* seat of care"; *this* stresses the seat, but that designation is equivocal about whether the borders are *of* this seat, as in a seat that is ours, or are they borders of a seat that does not touch anything that we could claim as our ground? "Care," "splendour," or "host" evoke a modicum of something that might be just as well nothing at all. If care seems like a kind of activity or activation, it might be an inactivity, nonactivity, or nonactivation—a form of rest or unforce that is weirdly economical and unlived. Approximate but never adjacent, "this seat of care" has all the trappings of a pathetic fallacy, but like a "splendour" added to things, it approaches without touching base; it is the edge or the limit of somewhere that is not specified. Care happens elsewhere, not in *this* or *that* planet or world. The sonnet's care pertains to nothing: neither terrestrial nor extraterrestrial, it operates in an "acosmic" space, to borrow a term from Szendy, where its terms of address are flung outward as if to immediately disperse that which has not arrived, and might never do so.[115]

The world is too much with us: It can be a world, another world, a possible world, an end-of-the-world, a beginning-of-the-world, a not world, a world with or without us, a turn to the planet. It can be no world, no planet. Bringing the world back for the Wordsworth of the late 1790s and early 1800s was a fraught recovery project: It produced anxieties around whether the work of poetry might conceptually disempower a world he otherwise vividly esteemed. That there might be, however, no concept of world addressed in his poetry is something that certain strands of romantic scholarship have at times deflected. Indeed, exempting the world goes part and parcel with early historicist critiques of Wordsworth that variously read his texts as eliding, deleting, or obscuring their relation to context and history.[116] Such accounts conceived of "poetry" as the work of bringing back the world that had been made to disappear, as if it never had the right to do so. Historicism thus attempts to reanimate romanticism's relevance by interpreting its context as linchpins for returning it (or turning us back) *to* the world.[117] But in doing so, historicism misreads what Meillassoux defines as the problem of "ancestrality": "any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species—or even anterior to every recognized form of life on earth."[118]

> For the correlationist, in order to grasp the profound meaning of the fossil datum, one should not proceed from the ancestral past, but from the correlational present. This means that we have to carry out *a retrojection of the past on the basis of the present*. What is given to us, in effect, is not something that is

> anterior to givenness, but merely something that is given in the present but gives itself *as* anterior to givenness. . . . To understand the fossil, it is necessary to proceed from the present to the past, following a logical order, rather than from the past to the present, following a chronological order.[119]

The ancestral past is anterior to humans: It is an impossible temporal dislocation, and it cannot be a gift of knowledge and meaning. To think a correlationist modernity is to assume that the past must give itself (must be subject to being given) in order to produce subjects in the present, subjects who, in turn, can give to themselves a knowledge *of* themselves. In hyperbolic terms, Meillassoux's critique of correlationism refuses any refund to the human subject who thinks about a world through her own lens. In spite of the often apocalyptic tenor of speculative realism, there is something in this turn to a world—a world without us, a "great outdoors . . . a past where both humanity and life are absent"[120]—that the present chapter has tried to remain skeptical about while also absorbing its theoretical willingness to think of a world in inhuman terms.[121] As a figure, the "great outdoors" spells the strangely romantic autonomy of a space that is not a world but still promises some *thing*, albeit profoundly removed from our thinking. I wonder whether the lure of the "great outdoors" might suggest another spot to think through: not how to get around the "givenness" of things but how to read that materiality between the given and the not given, a spot that is not a consensus or balance between the two, but a disastrous form where the lastness of the world, its last word, is impossibly and improperly glimpsed as unreadable, presenting itself as something that is always far from being finished.

2. Life Is Gone

> We want to be the poets of our life—first of all in the smallest, most everyday matters.
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

> Is an image not always already a compromise, the sign that life and being are inseparably linked in humans, and that life protects them from the indifference of being?
>
> —Alexander García Düttmann, "Is There a Self in Selfies?"

How do we begin to think of life as unwitnessable? In the conclusion to the poem "What Is Life?" John Clare provides this intricate response to the question posed by his title:

> Then what is Life?—When stript of its disguise
> A thing to be desir'd it cannot be
> Since every thing that meets our foolish eye
> Gives proof sufficient of its vanity—
> Tis but a trial all must undergo
> To learn unthankful mortals how to prize
> That happiness vain mans deny'd to know
> Until he's call'd to claim it in the skyes[1]

Clare's call to life is not his to make: Out of the midst of things, life is (the) uninvited and undesired. Demystifying life might show how insufficient it is as a concept or ideology, but doing so would also demonstrate how much we still hold onto it as an article of faith. Stripping down life to reveal its undesirability is something we "all must undergo," Clare writes, because it implicitly affords our eyes a special knowledge: to say or show that it is *this* particular feature about life that makes it broadly insufficient is to accept the sufficiency of that very claim as a vain gloss on life itself—a claim that stokes the desire to continue following life as if it belonged to us and, in turn, to read life as followable and witnessable, whether it be "an hour glass on the run/A mist retreating from the morning sun" or a "Bubble on the stream/that in the act of seizing shrinks to nought" (1–2, 5–6). It is as if "man"'s circular task in (and for) life were to serve as life's emissary—its ar-

bitrary consequence and figural precipitate. In this way, then, Clare's call "to claim *it* in the skyes" could be read as tacitly indifferent to the very making of that claim, a deflection of the compensatory profit that would come down to "unthankful mortals" whose right it is to know. Whatever "it" may be comes *after* life in two senses: Happiness could be redeemed only when one is called to find "it" in death, or happiness might be something that exceeds mortality altogether and is entirely distinct from the gainful promises of life *and* death. We might have "it," paradoxically, once we make light of the nonexperience, the nonpossession of life. This would be a happiness to be had, at the very last, by no one at all.

"The hero of 'life itself,'" writes Alexander García Düttmann, "does not exist; he demands infinite recognition since he can never be recognized. His uniqueness derives from the fact that 'life itself,' the 'something' that at bottom is neither mere nature nor the opposed culture that mediates it, always surpasses him so that he can neither act *in the name* of the 'something' nor as a hero *of* the 'something.'"[2] To be a hero *of* life is an impossible vocation because we cannot stand outside, beside, or within life as if we were simply grammatical subjects of a sentence. Life is not like an environment that brings selves together in mutual agreement and recognition. It cannot confirm. And furthermore, it is not for us in the sense that it is radically out of tune with our self-narratives. Indeed, for Jacques Derrida, "life itself" often corroborates fantasies of self-annihilation under the guise of the affirmative: For example, the nuclear arms race precisely indicates this destructive desire to affirm, to wage war "in the name of what is worth more than life. What gives life its worth is worth more than life. Such a war would indeed be waged *in the name of*."[3] What would it mean to think of life differently, as something uninvested in its naming? How to think of life as that which cannot be named, which surpasses us, and cannot be acted on behalf of? This is not life as sacred, unattainable, hygienically discrete, and separated out; rather, it is about the nonaccommodating nature of life itself, its unlivability.

I want to juxtapose two passages that, in spite of their hugely different contexts, consider the dependence of the unlived and the lived, as well as what to make of our inability to fully experience that relation:

> We here allude particularly to Turner, the ablest landscape painter now living, whose pictures are, however, too much abstractions of aerial perspective, and representations not so properly of the objects of nature as of the medium through which they are seen. They are the triumph of the knowledge of the artist, and of the power of the pencil over the barrenness of the subject. They are pictures of the elements of air, earth, and water. The artist delights to go

> back to the first chaos of the world, or to that state of things when the waters were separated from the dry land, and light from darkness, but as yet no living thing nor tree bearing fruit was seen upon the face of the earth. All is "without form and void." Some one said of his landscapes that they were *pictures of nothing, and very like*.[4]

> There is a certain popular delight in imagining the modern world in ruins. It's a theme Walter Benjamin identified early in the 20th century. In the shadow of the bomb, the Beats and their contemporaries occasionally gave it an incendiary cast. But what if we push beyond the picture of atomized cities to imagine not what passes but what is created at the end of human time? Our permanent legacy will not be architectural, but chemical. After the last dam bursts, after the concrete monoliths crumble into the lone and level sands, modernity will leave behind a chemical signature, in everything from radioactive waste to atmospheric carbon. This work will be abstract, not figurative.[5]

Abstraction emerges in both paragraphs as a practice of detachment from human figuration and design, and it contributes to the question of whether creativity could flourish before or after something like human life has taken place. For Hazlitt, the writer of the first passage (a footnote to his essay "On Imitation"), Turner's "pictures of nothing" put an end to a world, and their oddity lies in how he contradicts the principle that "true genius . . . does not lose its sympathy with humanity. It combines truth of imitation with effect, the parts with the whole, the means with the end."[6] "Pictures of nothing, and very like" is a remarkably acute turn of phrase. It is not clear if Hazlitt uses it as an outright criticism of Turner—after all, nothing is still something; but to add "and very like" hints that there are forms in the world that might resemble those that cannot be pictured. Ideally, sympathy is what genius channels in order to recognize humanity, but the footnote also complicates Hazlitt's remark about the "singular excess" of artists who veer toward the "pedantry and affectation" of their skill: "There is 'a pleasure in art which none but artists feel.' They see beauty where others see nothing of the sort."[7] The "knowledge of the artist," Hazlitt intimates, pushes Turner in a particular direction with his medium: As a landscape painter, he radically displaces the centrality of the human in landscape, and he remakes "objects of nature" into things or media that become, as Hazlitt pinpoints, utterly indifferent to "the face of the earth."

T. J. Clark notes that Hazlitt's footnote alludes to Michelangelo's depiction of the separation of light and darkness in the Sistine Chapel and that the allusion "had been transposed from the key of the Sistine, the key of massive symmetry of the first making of distinctions, to that of catastrophe."[8]

While Turner transforms cosmological barrenness into an opportunity for imagining the first creation—"when the waters were separated from the dry land, and light from darkness"—his paintings do not quite obliterate things, nor do they trade in myth. They delight in a roiling chaos that saturates his canvases. These works do not merely infer what "happens" before the human makes its geological mark on the earth but rather suggest that such chaos is fundamentally, molecularly, and destructively at work *now* in Turner's art in a way that surpasses the question of humanity's historical presence.

In this way, Hazlitt's terms coalesce with McKenzie Wark's prophecies (author of the second quotation) about our last residual artworks. If Hazlitt offers analepsis, Wark uses prolepsis: Only "chemical signatures" will remain as allegories of our minimal need to leave something behind, comprising everything from "radioactive waste to atmospheric carbon." But at the same time, Wark's future is unconcerned with distinctions between things that are or are not on the side of the human. Whatever the content and shape of that future, it would be radically aesthetic insofar as Wark's "signature" is like Kantian disinterested judgment without rule: the trace of a perception that is abstract or indifferent to all meanings. "We need," Wark continues, "a narratology of the elements, a way of writing that does not just treat the chemical world as if it gave rise to subjects equivalent to the humans, gods or monsters that usually populate narratives."[9] How might one let elements "write" themselves, and for whom would they be written in the absence of humans, gods, and monsters?

If abstraction is, as Hazlitt sees it, Turner's affirmation of an inhuman world layered over this one, "what is created at the end of human time" reveals Wark's fantasy of an authorless art that will creatively continue in spite of anyone to see or read it. The tenor of these passages is, to varying degrees, as much ecological as it is aesthetic, and what is at issue is how to imaginatively turn away from human life, how to think against a master trope over which we seemingly have no right of refusal. "Everything happens as if, in our culture," Giorgio Agamben notes in *The Open*, "life were *what cannot be defined, yet, precisely for this reason, must be ceaselessly articulated and divided*."[10] The Western philosophical exploration of this point, Agamben contends, begins with Aristotle who, in *De anima*, restates "every question concerning 'what something is' as a question concerning 'through what [*dia ti*] something belongs to another thing.' To ask why a certain being is called living means to seek out the foundation by which living belongs to this being."[11] Thus, to wonder about what the world looked like before or after human life is to still worry over how "life itself" is always in some way about our own ontology.

In his essay "The Sceptic," David Hume undertakes a different line of reflection. To take an interest in anything, he writes, is always a partial task because we cannot fully grasp nature's heterogeneity. Thus when we select *a* definition of life to synecdochically stand for "life itself," we are invariably led into error because our presumptions are based on subjective and impressionistic parts and details: "What is the meaning therefore of those general preferences of the town or country life, of a life of action or one of pleasure, of retirement of men, every one's experience may convince him, that each of these kinds of life is agreeable in its turn."[12] As Düttmann and Derrida remark, one cannot be *of* or act *in the name of* something that is, like life, constitutively apart from us; by walking away from life, Hume calmly refuses to see it as making a difference to anyone. In an astonishing conclusion, he states that life leaves no legacy, no chemistry, and no pictures of nothing, because there is no way to actually record such a bequest:

> In a word, human life is more governed by fortune than by reason; is to be regarded more as a dull pastime than as a serious occupation; and is more influenced by particular humour, than by general principles. Shall we engage ourselves in it with passion and anxiety? It is not worthy of so much concern. Shall we be indifferent about what happens? We lose all the pleasure of the game by our phlegm and carelessness. While we are reasoning concerning life, life is gone; and death, though *perhaps* they receive him differently, yet treats alike the fool and the philosopher. To reduce life to exact rule and method, is commonly a painful, oft a fruitless occupation: And is it not also a proof, that we overvalue the prize for which we contend? Even to reason so carefully concerning it, and to fix with accuracy its just idea, would be overvaluing it, were it not that, to some tempers, this occupation is one of the most amusing, in which life could possibly be employed.[13]

To give up on life: Is this truly the work of the skeptic? Skepticism defamiliarizes what the self can and cannot know by rending its own sense of how different it thinks it is from the world, but it can also lead the self to overvalue life as the bottomless obsession of its inquiries. "While we are reasoning concerning life, life is gone": In the interim, thinking about life for Hume means already not to live it, not to be a part of its livability. One forgets not only how one lives it or that one even does but also that *that* sense itself—of somehow assuming that one is a part of life—passes us by at the very moment we try to grasp it.

Tim Milnes argues that Hume's philosophical indifference—or what Charles Lamb vividly calls "Damned Philosophical Humeian indifference,

so cold & unnatural & inhuman"—is a challenge to Enlightenment projects of knowledge, and one to which romanticism in turn responds with "an alternating pattern of engagement with, and abstention from philosophical argument."[14] In response to Humean indifference, romanticism's "anti-philosophical turn," continues Milnes, "is itself sustained by a deep epistemological anxiety, just as its conviction that scepticism is merely a symptom of philosophy is tainted by the fear that philosophy is not a formal discipline but is itself a form of life, no more optional as an activity than thinking."[15] In this way, Milnes follows Cavell's assertion in *In Quest of the Ordinary* that "Romanticism's work here interprets itself . . . as the task of bringing the world back, as to life. This may, in turn, present itself as the quest for a return to the ordinary, or of it, a new creation of our habitat; or as the quest, away from that, for the creation of a new inhabitation," two distinct projects he identifies, respectively, with Wordsworth and Coleridge, Blake and Shelley.[16] If the world must be brought or returned to life for its sake and ours, recovery becomes a necessarily thinkable and livable task, turning us to "a form of life, no more optional as an activity than thinking." That the world ought to be brought back to life may indirectly imply that it has not always been so—that the thought of life is anterior to our being in the world: "About our worldlessness or homelessness, the deadness to us of worlds we still see but, as it were, do not recollect (as if we cannot quite place the world)—about this Wordsworth and Coleridge do not joke (though they can be funny)."[17] Jokes aside, the world one sees but does not recall inspires a gentle mode of therapy for Cavell: It holds us to the durability of the livable even if its difference from deadness cannot be defined. For Hume, by contrast, life *goes* rather than goes on; it is as if what counts for him is not the demonstrability of that sheer indifference but the degree to which it cannot be "reasoned" out. To be sure, Hume wants to turn away from attempts at characterizing life in order to accept ways of living it, to be *of* life but without having to determine that relation. But at the same time, he seems to be getting at a hazy border of life, a "life beyond life, life more than life," as Derrida calls it, as if coming close to (but not quite) stating that whatever we might call living is already a belated mistake and that we should not resolve it with fuller, more accommodating illustrations and terminologies.[18] Life is put aside just as one neutralizes the multiple terms one might invent to qualify it.

Citing a remark by J. L. Austin that "It [viz., the view of an epistemologically favored class of sense-statements] is perhaps the original sin . . . by which the philosopher cast himself out from the garden of the world we live in," Cavell notes:[19]

> The chief fault I find with Austin's parable of the world as Eden lies in the clause "the philosopher cast himself out from the garden of the world we live in." Gender identity aside, Austin is taking it that it is clear how philosophy is special in this casting of itself out, as though one can tell by looking, so to speak, which of us is and which of us is not philosophizing; as though it is clear how to end philosophy (to bring philosophy peace, Wittgenstein has said, hence how to tell whose life is found and whose lost by philosophy.[20]

Whoever claims to know how and where philosophy begins and ends also supposes something about where a philosopher's own life begins and ends. Cavell stresses, however, that for Austin, it is not the case that "the world is more than we can ever bargain for. The idea is rather that for all our human liability to error, the world is Eden enough, all the Eden there can be, and what is more, all the world there is: risk and error are inherent in the human, part of what we conceive human life to be."[21] In such a merely sufficient world, one can take or leave what it offers. But almost certainly, one cannot simply exit one side of the world—an Eden, for example—for another in order to gain a better perspective on it, as if the world had clear-cut positions, angles, edges, and leas from which to see things. There is no Eden, no Fall, no primal setting or scene for philosophy. Hume, even more than Cavell, walks away from life, but he does so by calmly staying in place: In the absence of fixing anything for the mind to occupy itself with, there cannot be very much of life to walk away from.

One difference between Hazlitt's and Wark's creative abstractions and Hume's is that there is something profoundly decreative in the latter's refusal to assign life a past or a future. In a way, one might conjecture that Hume has confused a skeptical argument about life with a scarcity that inscribes it. But Hume allows that such a confusion can and should be made: He releases the question of life from one level of observation where it is on the side of survival and living on. In this way, he almost imagines a nonanthropological philosophy that is no more optional for life than our presences are necessary for life's perdurability. Hume entertains the idea that because "life is gone" (allowing other vectors of "life" to transpire or some other quantities to emerge as replacements for it in our minds) life is of no concern because *life itself* is unconcerned. Life is without futures, chemical or otherwise; life is and is not there.

In this chapter, I continue to push upon what Hume means—or rather, what he chooses to *not* mean—in the brief, almost unremarkably constative dictum, "life is gone." Hume's indifference to life takes on the form of a release: It does not merely refuse a problem and leave it aside but imagines a

response that is the opposite of adaptability. By releasing the lastness of life in this way, he brings a certain normative insistence on life to an end. Releasing the last of life would be a kind of detachment from clarity or certitude directed at life, what Catherine Malabou calls a "farewell that is not death, a farewell that occurs within life, just like the indifference of life to life by which survival sometimes manifests itself."[22] The "science turn" in romantic studies has been marked by a resistance to this very point, as if life must be the elemental and sustainable core that animates, maintains, and intercepts all things.[23] And in this way, such arguments reproduce the very biopolitical anxieties that they otherwise seek to oppose because they construe life and being as vitally inextricable. To lay aside or be negligent with life, to look at it in its lastness, to refuse to maintain it as an object of conservation in any kind of long-lasting sense—all of these might seem perverse things to do. Beginning with Wordsworth, Rousseau, and Godwin and then later turning to Keats alongside photographic works by Joanna Kane and John Dugdale, this chapter asks: What is the unlived? What does it mean to never be syncopated with life? What happens when we no longer think that life needs to be imagined as a ground or context that we run alongside? Why is it that one just cannot let life *not* live itself?[24]

Perishing

In a series of powerful critiques on the turn to life in contemporary critical and cultural theory, Claire Colebrook argues that our awareness of the overwhelming plausibility of various kinds of extinctions around the world—social, geological, political, biological, ecological—is oddly uneven with current theoretical turns to affect, life, and the body:

> Life is, properly considered (which is to say, always considered in terms of what defines humanity), selection: we say that something is living if it maintains or strives to maintain itself through time. The dispersed, the haphazard, the inert, the contingent, the diffuse and the unformed—these are not living. They are therefore not only not *valuable* but also (significantly) not valuing. We value what values: we defend animal life because it too makes its way in the world, possesses a degree of choosing this rather than that, and is therefore on its way to something like meaning or sense. We seem to think not only that the prima facie value of life lies in its modes of flourishing, but that something like destruction and annihilation are *other than life and therefore unacceptable*.[25]

Colebrook's insight here is not simply that life is never anything but self-maintenance but rather that there is something immediately unacceptable

about any contrary reading of life that does not already seek to reinscribe it as a shared value. By disavowing life's negativity, we fall into what Shelley, in his essay "On Life," describes as an "education of error": Because things are signs "standing not for themselves but for others, in their capacity of suggesting one thought which shall lead to a train of thoughts," life itself is a swarm of significations, of "thoughts and feelings [which] arise, with or without our will."[26] Both a sign and a deferral of other signs, life does not coincide with any proper perspective from where it can apprehend itself since apprehension is a constitutively displaced and displacing endeavor, an "error" of reading that is as annihilating as it is meaning-making. "We live on, and in living we lose the apprehension of life": Whatever makes life apprehensible is not necessarily continuous with mere living on or survival; if we lose life by not apprehending it, it is not because we have lost some experiential dimension but because the readability of life is always errant, inscribed by the negative education that life occasions.[27] Thus, it is not simply that we must remember what we have lost; life itself is intensively unlivable and unacceptable.

For the sake of making an extreme comparison, let us consider Colebrook's notion of unacceptability alongside what the environmental activist Daniel Drumright calls an "irreconcilable acceptance" of near-term extinction, or the "acceptance that humanity has now crossed numerous irreversible climatic thresholds. . . . We have ushered in intractable near term extinction (NTE) of most of life within the next several decades. (If nature fails to bat last, nuclear containment pool fallout from grid collapse surely will.)"[28] Drumright's embrace of a future extinction event is gripping because he renders resignation and acceptance ferociously indiscernible; that indiscernibility, in turn, provokes less an opting out than a dwelling in disaster that seems to almost take him out of the equation: Personal distress, grief, "commiseration" make a space for getting away from inner life, of inhabiting a thought outside of interiority that resembles the "Zone" in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* but that lets the worst indifferently happen in spite of anyone there to live it—"to live outside the garden of anticipation," as Drumright calls it, hooked on the dependence of "*hopium*."[29]

The austerity of Drumright's claims compels us to read acceptance as a form of acknowledgment one can either take or leave since it cannot be of any help ("I have absolutely no interest in attempting to persuade anyone of this conjecture being either true or false.").[30] Indeed, there is something sublime in the essay's head-on embrace of destruction: His disinterest in persuasion interestingly buries our expectation of an author's capacity to deliver something through writing, as if the chemical traces that Wark writes about had already incinerated Drumright's piece. "If NTE is a tsunami, I'm

sure in the hell not going to wait for it to arrive, I'm going to swim out to it across the desert night sky."[31] And yet, accepting NTE binds Drumright to a concept of life that renders his perspective—the *I* that swims out across to greet disaster—central to its narration, and this way, it produces the kind of value that Colebrook critiques. Thus, acts of self-restraint in the face of worldly angst, or accommodations to a compromised future, only continue to promise that the scale of measurement for such situations is still for us to learn, even if they are unthinkable and incalculable.

If one cannot be a hero of life itself, what can one do otherwise? Lying in a rowboat off the island of Saint-Pierre after fleeing his home in Môtiers, Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes: "I have noticed in the changing fortunes of a long life that the periods of the sweetest joys and keenest pleasures are not those whose memory is most moving and attractive to me."[32] Rousseau extols a happiness derived from a long life that has learned to steadily fasten itself to "a single and last state." "Brief moments of madness and passion," by contrast, are not enough; they are "infrequent points along the line of our life [la ligne de la vie])."[33] What *is* the line of life for Rousseau? "The feeling of existence unmixed with any other emotion is in itself a precious feeling of peace and contentment," parrying all that "distract[s] us from it in this life and troubling the joy it could give us."[34] The affect behind this form of life is not necessarily something that Rousseau is able to take full account of because the "feeling of existence" is sweetly unlived. The line of life cannot be glimpsed from any one end, nor is it most intense in the middle. There is no past or future in Rousseau's happy life. Its lastness can happen at any particular moment or midst. "How do we distinguish one face or countenance from another," writes William Blake, "but by the bounding line and its infinite inflexions and movements? Leave out this line and you leave out life itself."[35] The bounding line establishes differences, but as it dissolves, faces and countenances turn into surfaces that cannot be discerned or read. Contra Blake, then, how does romanticism leave out the line of life? How does it perish?

In the opening of the book on "Books" in *The Prelude* (1805), Wordsworth laments the state of men, "sojourn[ers] on this planet," whose miseries are the result of "palms atchieved/Through length of time, by study and hard thought."[36] Here matters of culture, and the life that produces them, are subject to a fantasy of deletion:

> Thou also, Man, hast wrought,
> For commerce of thy nature with itself,
> Things worthy of unconquerable life;

And yet we feel, we cannot chuse but feel
That these must perish. Tremblings of the heart
It gives, to think that the immortal being
No more shall need such garments; and yet Man,
As long as he shall be the Child of Earth,
Might almost "weep to have" what he may lose,
Nor be himself extinguished; but survive
Abject, depressed, forlorn, disconsolate.
A thought is with me sometimes, and I say,
Should earth by inward throes be wrenched throughout
Or fire be sent from far, to wither all
Her pleasant habitations, and dry up
Old Ocean in his bed, left singed and bare,
Yet would the living Presence still subsist
Victorious; and composure would ensue,
And kindlings like the morning, presage sure,
Though slow, perhaps, of a returning day.
But all the meditations of mankind,
Yea, all the adamantine holds of truth,
By reason built, or passion, which itself
Is highest reason in a soul sublime;
The consecrated works of Bard and Sage,
Sensuous or intellectual; wrought by Men,
Twin labourers, and heirs of the same hopes,
Where would they be? Oh! why hath not the mind
Some element to stamp her image on
In nature somewhat nearer to her own?
Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad
Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?

(5: 17–48)

Different scales of perception collide here. If we read "commerce" as Wordsworth's term for tracing the self's relation to its own nature through exchange, then the "worthy" things it exchanges to quicken such commerce are ostensibly cast in order to sustain the future worth of eternal circulation. Like Deleuze and Guattari's last glass, the economy of trade disposes man and his goods in a repeatable motion, extending human life into the world. "And yet," Wordsworth wavers, "we feel, we cannot chuse but feel/That these must perish."[37] Where does this utterance or aside come from? Not being able to "chuse but feel" quivers with an intense, emotional immediacy,

"tremblings of the heart" that afford the smallest capacity for self-presence. Things made and thought by us could be worthy of unconquerable life, Wordsworth suggests; one could aspire to make "Verse/Deal boldly with substantial things" (12: 233–34). And to be sure, Wordsworth does worry about the mind's inability to stamp itself somewhere on nature.[38] After destruction, change is possible, albeit cautious: "kindlings like the morning, presage sure/Though slow, perhaps, or a returning day." That one could adapt to new things returning—or that adaptation would even be possible—marks a kind of magical thinking around made things and being able to work through their finitude. It is also a wish for reversibility, in other words, that haunts the logic of fabrication, as Hannah Arendt argues in *The Human Condition*: "Every thing produced by human hands can be destroyed by them, and no use object is so urgently needed in the life process that its maker cannot survive and afford its destruction."[39] But Wordsworth feels that reversibility less as an enabling feature of man and more as a misapprehension of *what* disposes *whom* and how one parses that thought. To not be able to choose but feel the pressure of the perishable implies an "irreconcilable acceptance" of the irreversible reversibility of the *now no more*, something thinkable but not livable. It is as if Hume's fact/value distinction—the difference between what *is* and what *ought to be*—is compressed into sheer illegibility by a speaker who merely expresses "habits of mind" that in turn obey "blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits."[40] Wordsworth's affects thus become less and less equivalent to the spontaneous overflow of a subject's powerful emotions and more about an inhuman feeling of life that cannot be possessively felt.[41]

In *Aporias*, Derrida states that *to perish* etymologically gestures at "the traversal marked in Latin by the *pereo*, *perire* (which means exactly: to leave, disappear, pass—on the other side of life, *transire*)."[42] To say that things *must perish* means to push through a limit, but it also smudges the very delineation of limits, to not know where they rest or how they push against us just as we think we have supposedly overcome them. Perishing, unlike dying, is an "ending of the living": It minimally marks the impossibility of knowing what or where a beginning, middle, or an end of life might be.[43] Not being able "to chuse but feel/That these must perish" evokes just this kind of inchoate, disjunctive sense of an unavoidable limit to our relation to life, but without having to trace it as a line. As things perish, life ends—not just Wordsworth's but life as essence of the world. Wordsworth's frail reproductive figure of man, "the child of earth," precariously emphasizes the brevity of that sojourn, or our renting of the earth as Michel Serres calls it.[44] Left "abject, depressed, forlorn, disconsolate," life might return in the form of

elegy to console us, but elegy itself, like the melancholic affects that accompany it, is merely a "chemical signature." Wordsworth's allusion to a line from Shakespeare's sonnet sixty-four implicitly bears out this destructive line of thinking: "Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate,/That Time will come and take my love away./This thought is as a death, which cannot choose/But weep to have that which it fears to lose."[45] The gist of the sonnet, part of the sequence dedicated to the young man, meditates on decay and the transience of culture, and the sentimentalism behind the death of love derives from mourning something or someone as always lost. At the same time, however, the thought of ruinous love is itself a death within thinking: Thoughts cannot prevent, predict, or announce their disappearances to the thinker. They perish and pass, regardless of whether or not we think we hold onto them. We cannot feel or think these forms of perishing because they are not wished by us, yet a glimpse of them is afforded when romanticism wrestles with a last thought or a last feeling. In *The Prelude*, poetic life occurs in a belated flash or a moment of destructive pressure or tension: It is a glitch, a remaindered unit that dissolves all the reactive operations of man undertaken in the service of "unconquerable life."

Human Hatred

In a chapter from the section "Of Property" in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), William Godwin launches into a bizarre reflection on the triumph of the mind's last thought over the mortal body:

> If mind be now in a great degree the ruler of the system, why should it be incapable of extending its empire? If our involuntary thoughts can derange or restore the animal economy, why should we not in the process of time, in this as in other instances, subject the thoughts which are at present involuntary to the government of design? If volition now can do something, why should it not go on to do still more and more? There is no principle of reason less liable to question than this, that, if we have in any respect a little power now, and if mind be essentially progressive, that power may, and, barring any extraordinary concussions of nature, infallibly will, extend beyond any bounds we are able to prescribe to it.[46]

Evoking his own version of "unconquerable life," Godwin imagines purging the mind of its dependencies on "animal economy" since the body and the senses feebly distract thought's otherwise sovereign happiness. Listlessness, melancholy, and infirmity: All are opportunistic bodily affects that mortify the mind's perfectibility. And in addition, "before death can be banished, we

must banish sleep, death's image," writes Godwin, channeling Macbeth by taking the sight of sleep as a perversion of lucid thinking. "Sleep is one of the most conspicuous infirmities of the human frame. It is not, as has often been supposed, a suspension of thought, but an irregular and distempered state of the faculty."[47] Only wakefulness is a structure adequate to a "life beyond life"—an attentiveness that could always be lived, seen, and thought as a consequence of its radical refusal of the body's weaknesses. Godwin thus hyperbolizes the anticorrelational argument set forth by Ray Brassier: "Thinking has interests that do not coincide with those of living."[48] What is supplemental to thinking—biological life—is the error that transforms it into a thoughtless thing rather than a thing that thinks.

Life, for Godwin, is endurable only to the extent that it can be disembodied and made "indifferent to the gratifications of sense" that he abjects as mere "novelty." But there is an even more difficult moment in the chapter where he draws a strangely moving sketch about a future planet of forsaken—and forsaking—humans:

> The men therefore who exist when the earth shall refuse itself to a more extended population, will cease to propagate, for they will no longer have any motive, either of error or duty, to induce them. In addition to this they will perhaps be immortal. The whole will be a people of men, and not of children. Generation will not succeed generation, nor truth have in a certain degree to recommence her career at the end of every thirty years. There will be no war, no crimes, no administration of justice as it is called, and no government. These latter articles are at no great distance; and it is not impossible that some of the present race of men may live to see them in part accomplished. But beside this there will be no disease, no anguish, no melancholy and no resentment. Every man will seek with ineffable ardour the good of all. Mind will be active and eager, yet never disappointed. Men will see the progressive advancement of virtue and good, and feel that, if things occasionally happen contrary to their hopes, the miscarriage itself was a necessary part of that progress. They will know, that they are members of the chain, that each has his several utility, and they will not feel indifferent to that utility. They will be eager to enquire into the good that already exists, the means by which it was produced, and the greater good that is yet in store. They will never want motives for exertion; for that benefit which a man thoroughly understands and earnestly loves, he cannot refrain from endeavouring to promote.[49]

Godwin's austere paragraph reads like a disanthropic, queer prayer for a planet without women and children, one where adult men will be sealed off and "no longer have any motive to induce them."[50] In a reversal of

Arendt's concept of natality, Godwin pushes thought, however impossibly, to its lastness, as if to circumvent the question that Deborah Britzman asks about education's trauma of origins: "When it comes to the very thought of education, what is it like to feel one's beginnings over and over and to receive oneself and be received by others as if one has never had to start life?"[51] Although the dream of immortality Godwin fantasizes about seems like a state of godlike overliving, thinking is not quite enlisted here to help propagate even more life. Contemplation falls on the side of scarcity, on the very minimum needed for a "feeling of existence" to sustain itself indefinitely over and above heteronormative life. Godwin's "no future" reads reproduction as a nightmare of superfluity or plenitude, and like Lee Edelman's unidentifiable *sinthom*osexual who, after Lacan's definition of the "sinthome," "refuses the Symbolic logic that determines the exchange of signifiers; it admits no translation of its singularity and therefore carries nothing of meaning," Godwin's adults partake of no exchange that willingly gives up on the jouissance or pleasure of their indifference to life.[52] When "the earth shall refuse itself to a more extended population," the project of generational succession, hitching thought to the triumph of the social body's life, will be shut down. The last men will be full of last thoughts and last feelings; at that point, maybe human immortals, in their finite infinitude, will begin to properly assess what is disastrously unthinkable in the present.

But what *is* the earth's refusal in this passage? To be sure, Godwin's fantasy replaces one humanist metaphor with another: Unlike von Trier's Melancholia, a planet that does not manifest any necessary relation to the living world it will soon demolish, Godwin's earth bears the work of dissatisfaction as its own "planetary dysphoria" (to recall Apter's term), that very figure that refuses reproduction and life and, in so doing, testifies to inhuman refusal. But in its refusal, Godwin's earth cannot help but perform—and think—its act in relation to the human population that erroneously conceives of it as an earth-in-itself or an earth-for-us. The fantasy of existing after the "earth shall refuse itself to a more extended population, will cease to propagate," means that it is we who readily plot a timeline for such a refusal to take place—in other words, we invest the earth with the expectation of its refusal-to-come, one that at some mature point will be socially and politically transformative for our Godwinian adulthood. And by virtue of this last refusal, our queer life on earth will become thinkable in the absence of motives and duties. By recognizing that we are "members of the chain, that each has his several utility, and they will need not feel indifferent to that utility," Godwin re-emphasizes the purposiveness of immortal membership: The figure of the chain makes possible the trope of contiguity that motors

"the progressive advancement of virtue and good," thus pledging faith in the utilitarianism that inscribes life and is formally inextricable from it. "They will be eager to enquire into the good that already exists, the means by which it was produced, and the greater good that is yet in store. They will never want motives for exertion, for that benefit which a man thoroughly understands and earnestly loves, he cannot refrain from endeavouring to promote": The futural machinery of good wipes away any consideration of destructive exertions that do not operate on the side of life.

Thus the usefulness that Godwin envisions in life derives from the apparent indivisibility of life from use—a life, moreover, that might be closer to what Agamben calls a habit or a "*form-of-life* . . . a life that can never be separated from its form," and thus cannot be biopolitically objectified or separated out as naked or bare life.[53] "It defines a life—human life—in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life" that are not "prescribed by a specific biological vocation."[54] It is worth citing Agamben at length for his text's resonances with Godwin's:

> That same drawing of naked life that, in certain circumstances, the sovereign used to be able to exact from the forms of life is now massively and daily exacted by the pseudoscientific representations of the body, illness, and health, and by the "medicalization" of ever-widening spheres of life and of individual imagination. Biological life, which is the secularized form of naked life and which shares its unutterability and impenetrability, thus constitutes the real forms of life literally as forms of *survival*: biological life remains inviolate in such forms as that obscure threat that can suddenly actualize itself in violence, in extraneousness, in illnesses, in accidents. It is the invisible sovereign that stares at us behind dull-witted masks of the powerful who, whether or not they realize it, govern us in its name.
>
> A political life, that is, a life directed toward the idea of happiness and cohesive with a form-of-life, is thinkable only starting from the emancipation from such a division, with the irrevocable exodus from any sovereignty.[55]

Agamben's political life, like Godwin's immortal life, achieves happiness once a certain end moves within the range of its means and thus is put in the service of a new use. In other words, when life's form cannot be excerpted and separated out from the singularity of "life itself." For both philosophers, thought becomes the "nexus that constitutes the forms of life in an inseparable context as form-of-life"[56] because as an experience, thinking, for Agamben, is not an instrumentalizing faculty; rather, it is powerfully receptive to its own potentiality as

a thought and as a form-of-life. "Only if I am not always already and solely enacted, but rather delivered to a possibility and a power, only if living and intending and apprehending themselves are at stake each time in what I live and intend and apprehend—only if, in other words, there is thought—only then can a form of life become, in its own factness and thingness, *form-of-life*."[57]

In similar ways, Godwin and Agamben ignore the very impasse that Hume draws into relief: the possibility of not wanting to form one's life or a life at all. Why would thinking have to step in line with potentiality? In a brilliant essay on seriousness and self-preservation, Düttmann remarks that a serious disposition is caught up in its own survival in the world, taking every anxious challenge to living on (whether it is disaster, precarity, illness, etc.) and dialectically metabolizing it as integral to its persistence. A last thought or feeling might be outrageous precisely because it interferes with the self's acculturation: as a culminating endpoint, the last phenomenalizes the collapse of total knowing and affection, after which there is nothing else to think about or feel.

> To be serious is to have realised just in time that something implacable and ineluctable is on the way, something that is already there and that requires my full attention. Where there is seriousness, there is destiny. Hence seriousness is about form as the last resort against the chaos of a breakdown. Never is form so pure, never does content depend so much on form as when seriousness arises from a threat posed to self-preservation. Seriousness is the outlook of form, the coolness of making distinctions and feeling and knowing the weight of things. This is why seriousness must regularly guard itself, and the self, against the wrong form of seriousness, against a distorting, erosive and self-eroding form.[58]

Seriousness's form deploys itself autoimmunitively, a defensive "last resort" with and against whatever compels its self-preserving faith in the face of a "distorting, erosive" counter-force that is intrinsic to seriousness itself. In its pure form, seriousness feels and knows "the weight of things," but form *is* impure. Following Godwin, feeling and knowing might gain an autonomous seriousness in their own right if pushed to an extreme: They might become utterly impervious to the self's progress through time and abandon survival altogether. Thinking and feeling could become a last resort against the self's compulsion to be relentlessly and efficiently serious about its perseverance. In this case, Kant's outrage at the last thought is even stranger than it first seems: If the end of all things is naïve because it eliminates the seriousness of a subject's continuity through space and time—its realization that something is always "on the way"—it is also all the more shocking because the subject comes face-to-face with a thought that is *not* the subject's own, a thought

without a thinker. Such a thought now beholds or gazes at the subject with utterly serious indifference to his or her self-preserving impulses. Might this be another kind of refusal, *a refusal to think of life seriously* or, put differently, to refuse that life must be a serious thing for us?

Such a refusal of seriousness, I wager, occurs in Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence," where the inability to properly hear another marks a turning away within conversation—a poetry of carelessness or a careless poetry, as it were, that for a moment gives up on intersubjective life:

> The Old Man still stood talking by my side;
> But now his voice to me was like a stream
> Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
> And the whole Body of the man did seem
> Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
> Or like a Man from some far region sent;
> To give me human strength, and strong admonishment.
>
> My former thoughts return'd: the fear that kills;
> The hope that is unwilling to be fed;
> Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;
> And mighty Poets in their misery dead.
> And now, not knowing what the Old Man had said,
> My question eagerly did I renew,
> "How is it that you live, and what is it you do?"
>
> (113–26)

In a scene where the earth refuses all things and distinctions, Wordsworth shifts the poem to a level of thinking where the minimal attributes of human/nonhuman forms are carefully weighed, judged, and blurred. Confusion over communication releases life's meaninglessness just as the poet-speaker describes a hallucinatory moment of misalignment with the leech gatherer's preceding narrative about his life and occupation. When the poet says that "now his voice to me was like a stream/Scarce heard," he means a sparseness of vocalization—a rare sound, but also one that is passed by and left unabsorbed. For Geoffrey Hartman, the leech gatherer's voice alludes to the Apocalypse of Saint John, where the "figure [that] prophesies the flood of a new revelation, is itself a flood of revelation," and will "gather up man into the stream of life."[59] By contrast, I read a strange unworking or *désoeuvrement* of voice and its capacities for revelatory audibility, as if voice and the stream were so close to one another that they were barely distinguishable as "serious" conversation. We might remember that in Lewis Carroll's parody

of "Resolution and Independence," he spoofed the line in this way: "And his answer trickled through my head/Like water through a sieve."[60] Here the seriousness of the line and the listener's capacity to seriously listen and hold onto it—as if to preserve oneself with and through the weight of the poem—flows out like a "sieve," letting go of the illusions—and the life—worth keeping. Liquefied, it does not hold; it is a remainder of what haunts theories of sustainability, and it is not quite the sort of expendable, self-annihilating energy that Georges Bataille imagines outside of classical economy: It is the nonapprehension of apprehension itself.[61] Wordsworth's poet, in spite of himself, does not listen seriously, and neither does the leech gatherer, but they do listen *otherwise*: Whatever is "scarce heard" evaporates scale, measurement, and equivalence. When the question "How is it that you live, and what is it you do?" is renewed, it is because of a breakdown in thinking and hearing, an indifference of bodies to each other and their conventionally communicative (i.e., serious) uses.

By not listening *for life*, Wordsworth gets at a modality of sound that is irreducible to lived experience—a nonsound or insensibility that cannot be felt but is somehow there in its philological strangeness, to recall Hamacher—a "stone" or "contracted world" that says everything and means nothing.[62] With a "more than human weight" (77), the leech gatherer is not superhuman but something unraveled and threadbare—less a form-of-life than a figure that retreats from that very concept—"like one whom I had met with in a dream" and stays there (117), an unlivable figure in life that refuses to live, to seriously take up form. The entry from Dorothy Wordsworth's journal that inspired "Resolution and Independence" gets at this very point: On Friday October 3, 1800, she records a rainy morning, and later in the evening during a walk with her brother, they encounter

> an old man almost double. . . . He had had a wife "& a good woman & it pleased God to bless us with ten children"—all these were dead but one of whom he had not heard for many years, a Sailor—his trade was to gather leeches but now leeches are scarce & he had not strength for it—he lived by begging & was making his way to Carlisle where he should buy a few godly books to sell. He said leeches were very scarce partly owing to this dry season, but many years they have been scarce—he supposed it owing to their being much sought after, that they did not breed fast, & were of slow growth. Leeches were formerly 2/6 100; they are now 30/. He had been hurt in driving a cart his leg broke his body driven over his skull fractured—he felt no pain till he recovered from his first insensibility. It was then "late in the evening, when the light was just going away."[63]

Dorothy gives us a queer image of leech life ("they did not breed fast") outside of the failed economy to which the man is hopelessly indentured, split as he is between being a human gathering leeches and a human unable to disappear like the leeches—a "more than human weight" that is torn from itself. If the poet in "Resolution and Independence" seems to engage the leech gatherer like a figural prosthesis, outsourcing him like the Hegelian lord using the body of the slave to test his own worth—an oppressive forming of life—Dorothy observes the man with a remarkable prosaic seriousness. Her journal's text is detached, hesitant, and not nourishing; it is not on the side of cheering for the seriousness of life in the scene before her. In its staccato-like sobriety, quantification and description are her style of thinking about how *this life* does not have reasons to preserve itself, that life is gone, and that "preservation" is not quite the word for what is going on in this episode where what is and is not being maintained and gathered up is as far afield as possible from questions of self-maintenance and life. The man does not have a life to form, or a form-of-life, and in the space of Dorothy's journal, what happened that day, and that was, at that time, a certain *today*, now seems austerely indiscernible from her brother's *now no more*.[64]

It is tempting to wonder whether something in that encounter between the leech gatherer and his interlocutors also formally haunts the relation of the journal entry to the poem: Having cannibalized his sister's thoughts, Wordsworth's attitude has often been interpreted as collaborative or compensatory at best, or predatory at worst. But what if these two texts were unfinished things, hovering beside each other in Eve Sedgwick's sense of that word as "a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking"? One is beside and athwart but not beneath or above anything. "*Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations."[65] Beside each other, one begins to look at the two texts differently: Beside-ness evokes form over action, system over identity; rather than comparing and contrasting them, one might read the poem and the journal entry in terms of their adjacencies and points of impersonal contact, their formal refusals to match up and consolidate their relation to one another. Beside-ness thus becomes a spatial "dead spot, a pause, that comes between two works" but that cannot be turned into a threshold for translation, interpretation, or any other kind of exchange.[66] We cannot choose but feel that life in this midst, this beside-ness, is gone: There is nothing between the texts that evolves, thrives, or exudes potentiality and becoming.

Sleepy Heads

In her essay on Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, Barbara Johnson partly quotes from Nietzsche's *Human All Too Human*: "'We look at everything through the human head and cannot cut this head off; while the question remains, What would be left of the world if it had been cut off?' The end of man would seem then to be that which cannot be *lived* by any man."[67] *Man*, *human*, *end*: All of these are figures and devices for objectifying the world; but at the same time, each figure is, in turn, *as a thing*, subject to other views besides its own. For reasons that chime with Kant's, Johnson implies that we cannot properly "live" the end because livability functions as a trope for the meaningfulness—indeed, the needfulness—of having a point of view that will interpret and survive the end of all things. "Would the end of man take place," asks Johnson, "*before* or *after* the death of the last man? Would the final cut take place only after the death of the last man, or would it consist of his testimony, his unprecedented experience of survival?"[68] As a "limit-narrative of decapitation,"[69] an end of all things would bring down the curtain entirely on all human points of view, rendering past, present, and future timelines indiscernible as principles of life. "The end" would be theoretically unlivable—the impossible point where one fantasizes about posthumously coinciding with something that resembles the Lacanian gaze or an originary blind spot of figuration.[70]

In Joanna Kane's photographic portrait series *The Somnambulists*, we come close to beholding one kind of visual "limit-narrative of decapitation" (Plate 5), although the objects of focus are life and death masks taken from the Edinburgh Phrenological Society, mixing famous and unknown historical figures. Bentham, David, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats, among others, all "appear" in the series alongside or *beside* other bodies identified as "Violinist," "Sami Boy," or "Unknown Woman."[71] The rough chronology of the masks' "living subjects" falls between the late eighteenth through to the end of the nineteenth centuries; many of the figures remain undated and anonymous, beautifully thing-like and resembling some of the anatomical specimens Kane also includes in her project.[72] Because the masks belong to a posthumous time that is neither the past tense of the actual subject nor the "present" time of the mask itself, the way station of their nonlives makes them seem like deracinated and autonomous last thoughts or last *things* caught in their impossible duration. "Mourning is the state of mind in which feeling revives the empty world in the form of a mask," writes Walter Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, but the "representation" of the "laws which govern the *Trauerspiel* . . . does not concern itself with the

Plate 1. Hubert Robert (1733–1808), *The Accident*. Oil on canvas. (Musée Cognacq-Jay, Paris, France/Bridgeman Images)

Plate 2. Tatsuo Miyajima, *Arrow of Time (Unfinished Life)*. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, New York)

Plate 3. Caspar David Friedrich, *The Polar Sea*, 1824. Oil on canvas. (Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany/Bridgeman Images)

Plate 4. Paterson Ewen, *Close Up of a Planet with Three Satellites*, 1995. Acrylic paint, stain, and nails on gouged and planed plywood, 50 × 77 in. (© Mary Alison Handford)

Plate 5. Joanna Kane, life masks of William Blake, John Keats, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from *The Somnambulists*, 2008. (Dewi Lewis Publishing 2008)

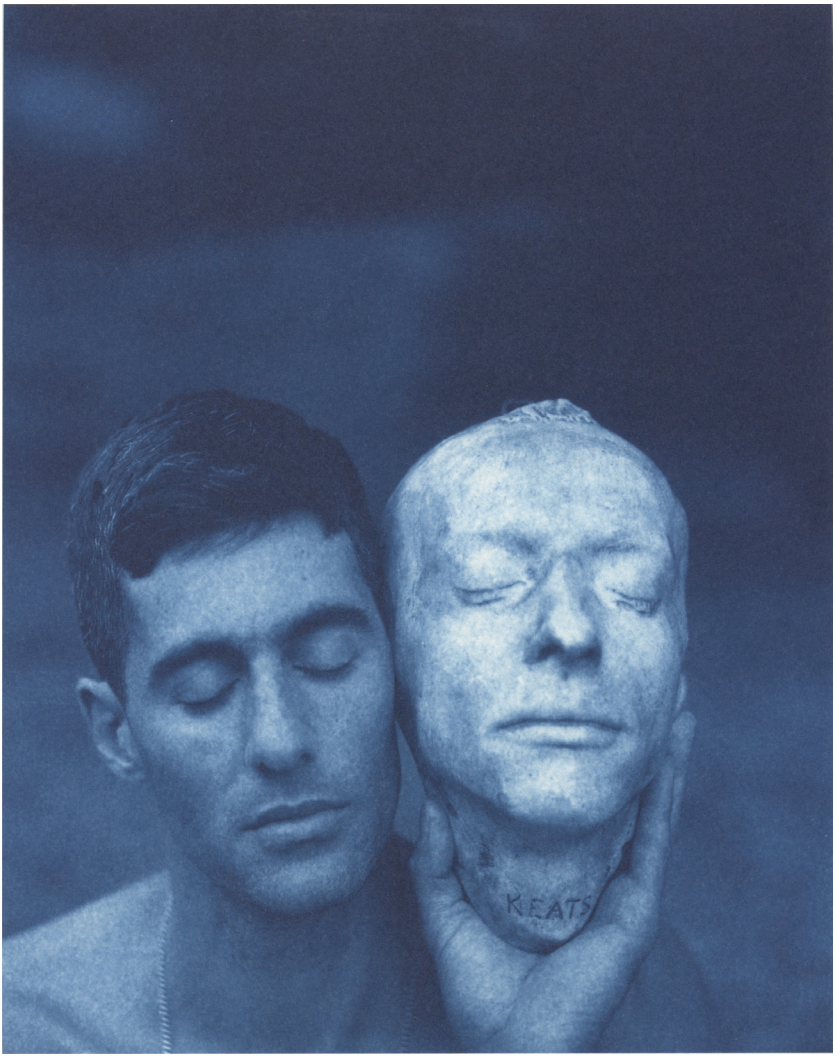

Plate 6. John Dugdale, *Death Mask of John Keats*, 1999. Cyanotype. (© John Dugdale)

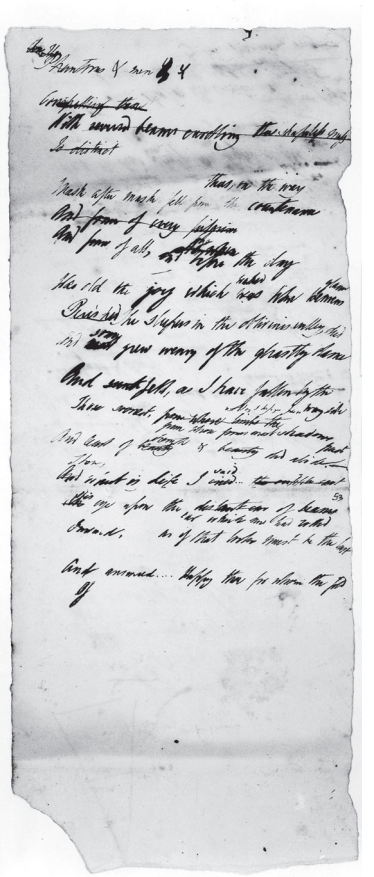

Plate 7. Manuscript page from *The Triumph of Life*. (MS. Shelley adds. c.4, fols. 19–58 [52v+53r]. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford)

Plate 8. Peter Hujar, *Triumph*, 1976. Vintage gelatin silver print. (© 1987 The Peter Hujar Archive LLC. Courtesy Pace/MacGill Gallery, New York, and Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco)

emotional condition of the poet or his public, but with a feeling which is released from any empirical subject and is intimately bound to the fullness of an object."[73] The "pensiveness" of melancholy that Benjamin locates in the German baroque text releases feeling into allegorical independence, and it is no accident that the photograph—the other medium of impersonal, nonrecognitional release for Benjamin—hyperbolizes that very mood of shattered indexicality. In her own collection, however, Kane's masks are "portraits from before photography," and thus they evoke an inoperative community of lives that are visible in their invisibility to the camera, outliving history, as it were—an experience of (non)life outside the historical.[74]

If the goal of the Society was to record and retain the "traces from life" in each cast by systematizing, analyzing, archiving, and finally re-collecting these subjects for posterity, Kane's own purpose (at least on the surface) is to affirm the materiality of history: "In creating the portraits, the aim has been to take these subjects out of the categories and hierarchies of the phrenological collection" and release them into something other than life. *The Somnambulists* thus does not exactly bring these subjects to life but extracts them as phrenological precipitates, depositing their images "between life, death, and sleep." "Photography grasps what is given as a spatial (or temporal) continuum," writes Siegfried Kracauer; "memory-images retain what is given only insofar as it has significance."[75] If memory-images remain "embedded in the uncontrollable life of the drives . . . they are opaque like frosted glass that hardly a ray of light can penetrate." Only a "liberated consciousness" can distinguish an image of "what has been recognized as true" from the morass of the drives.[76] Kracauer calls the latter a "last image" of a person or thing: "In it alone does the unforgettable persevere. The last image of a person is that person's actual '*history*'" because it overcomes the "uncontrollable life" of the drives. Photography buries "a person's history . . . as if under a layer of snow"[77]: It compels consciousness to strike out and "see its own material base" and "brings to the fore the entire natural shell; or the first time the inert world presents itself in its independence from human beings."[78] As specimens or *exempla*, Kane's photographs departicularize their subjects as cast images of faces, distinctly nonvibrant matter kept "under snow" that is irrecuperable by historical memory.

The phrenological image cites a life without remembering it, which is to say: a life that does not coincide with anything like a face, head, or body to which it is biographically assigned. As a series (from the Latin *serere*, "to link, to join, to string together"[79]), Kane photographs her masks exposed to a "time after death but before putrefaction," an unaccountable kind of temporality that lies between the thought of mortality and the unthinkable

materiality of degradation. At once after death and yet before decay, the afterness of the casts in Kane's "portraits" devastate the requirements of elegy: If loss is meaningful because it bears witness to the end of a life, these masks, as likenesses, hollow out the lives they ostensibly enfold. In them, there is an absence of the quotient of "life" that gives tone and gravity to loss. They are remarkably flat in the way that Roland Barthes refers to the photograph's "flat death," or a form of death that compresses the image to rid it of any communicable inwardness: "The only 'thought' I can have is that at the end of this first death, my own death is inscribed; between the two, nothing more than waiting; I have no other resource than this *irony*: to speak of the 'nothing to say.'"[80] Phrenology becomes for Kane an early instance of a *noeme* of photography that achieves something much different than it did for Barthes: It interrupts or smears the ontological integrity of the subject, cutting into the logic of human sequencing and narration by giving image to the rawness of the photographic part of the species itself, the material detail that overwhelms the whole in its tightly cropped and contained fragmentariness. Not alive, asleep, or dead, each photo is "an analogue and digital hybrid, a composite from a large or medium-format chemical negative" that is "scanned digitally and then "manipulated . . . to construct, to invoke, a lifelike image."[81] While the digital, as opposed to the analogic, encodes an archival trace within itself, it is a strictly nonindexical manipulation of a negative—or a *negativity*—that is the underside of the nominal image. In this way, the digital is like a death drive: It hyperbolizes a deanimating force that the photograph (like the mask) bears as it strips away at what Jean-Luc Nancy calls the "ground [*fond*] of the image"—the "impalpable non-place that is not merely the 'support' but the *back* or the *underside* of the image" that is inextricable from the image, even as the latter exists by virtue of being detached from the ground that disappears into it.[82] It is as if the photographs testify to a "lifetime" within chronological thought that refuses to be named—a time that is not of life but something else—a thing-like indifference, a poetic life, a photograph that consists of "entering and exiting . . . appearing and disappearing. Not first representing, but first being or making 'a time, *une fois*,' a first and last time, the time [*temps*] of making or taking an image. . . . The time, *la fois* . . . that is what exits the no-time, the *sans-fois*, to return to it immediately."[83] Kane's photographic images abide in just this nonplace, the infinite lastness that emanates *after* but also to *the side of* the death of the subject—a lastness that is something other than mortality. In this interval, the image-masks errantly sleepwalk out of time.[84]

What would *a* Wordsworthian, *a* Keatsian, *a* Blakean, *a* Coleridgean life look like?[85] Pictures of nothing, perhaps. Kane's photographs refute index-

icality by exposing the image to something unlived within it or, in other words, a life that is gone, not in the sense of a life drained away but a suspension or *abstention*. Somewhere between interruption and movement, *The Somnambulists* presents a kind of negative, unstruck latency where the facial imprint—a life of Wordsworth, of Blake, etc.—inchoately withdraws into the dark ground that is less the backdrop to each mask than an "outside" that draws the head beyond the authenticating recognizability of the face, beyond the defunct pseudoscience of phrenology, and toward a limit-image of figural decapitation. There is a simple fact behind making these masks: The sitter must close his or her eyes in order to begin the process of casting.[86] One does not see the plaster as it is put on the face, and in this way, closing one's eyes amounts less to a dreaming than to a prayer-like supplication or humility of grace that awaits without gratification. This waiting might last a lifetime or a minute, and Kane's *Somnambulists* dwells with this inhuman temporality, open-ended and sudden, intervallic and permanent. I am reminded of Friedrich Schiller's reflections on the bodiless marble head of the *Juno Ludovisi*, whose "whole form reposes and dwells within itself, a completely closed creation, and—as though it were beyond space—without yielding, without resistance; there is no force to contend with force, no unprotected part where temporality might break in."[87] To look on the photographs and historically group Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats as "Romantic poets" sentimentalizes and renders nostalgic what Kane's series profoundly decreates. They are exposed to an effacing neutrality, a burial under snow, as it were, that allows for the image to be looked at *in its looking away from us*, receding into dusty grayness. "We find ourselves at the same time in the condition of utter rest and extreme movement, and the result is that wonderful emotion for which reason has no conception and language no name."[88]

The neutrality in Schiller's remarks also chimes with a well-known moment in Keats's final letter of November 30, 1820: "I have an habitual feeling of my real life having past, and that I am leading a posthumous existence."[89] As if repeating Hume's dictum "life is gone," Keats hints at something like the "feel of not to feel it," the negative capability of lifelessness as a nonexperience one cannot ever properly find oneself in correspondence with.[90] Caught in the "interval between a death sentence and death," as Karen Swann notes, the "undetonated possibilities"[91] of this interval refer less to Keats's real or biographical life than about forms of perishing, disappearing, and passing that traverse the materiality of the letters themselves, multiple ends of lives and ends of worlds detonating in "the experience without poetry," as Rei Terada writes, "that Keats was able to know at the end of his life."[92] Such an existence expresses (if it at all can) what it means to be with-

out poetry and without life in a way that is qualitatively nonphenomenal, extinct, and indifferent—a life one cannot quite have.

The posthumous is, like Kant's last thought or last feeling, stubbornly inimical to the monopolies of life and death: It does not just terminate but rather it is the last of a life (etymologically, the last-born), released from familiar and self-referential movements, biographies, and explicating narratives—a life of which Keats and his poetry are not the heroes. To read Keats thinking about his posthumous existence in a "last letter," collected in the chronology of the Harvard edition of the *Letters*, is to fall into the tangled temporalities of the epistolary form that breaks apart the commemorative containment of something like a "life *of* letters." Writing feverishly to friends and relatives, Keats addresses others nonsequentially and in multiple timeframes; after all, when and where does life ever begin and end through letters? What *is* the last letter of Keats's posthumous and unpublishable life? How does one address a life, both in the sense of speaking to it and writing about it, in order to ensure its delivery to the proper place where life lives? In these spaces of a life that is at odds with self-reflection, the letters become less transmissions and solicitations than inhuman traces and spacings without Keats. When one writes a letter, what does one see or look upon? Imagine the look of Keats in his letters: a head with either closed or open eyes, a look that looks at nothing but the words on the page, unconcerned with reading and seeing friends and their responding gazes, but nevertheless *still looking* and *looking still*. Each address—"To Charles Brown," "To Fanny Brawne," "To Benjamin Haydon," etc.—becomes part of the invisible periphery of the epistolary frame, marking an anonymous, posthumous life of friendships outside of or around the frame that we *do not see* and that beckons us to an end of life that is like an "experience without poetry."

To my eyes, Keats's "limit-narrative of decapitation" emerges in a heart-stopping self-portrait by the contemporary American photographer John Dugdale, holding against his cheek the Keats death mask (Plate 6). One evening in Ridgefield, Connecticut, Dugdale stood on the property that belonged to his dear friend Maurice Sendak, having borrowed the latter's mold of the mask. To say that he *took* a photograph, however, might not be exactly the right word. Relying throughout his career on nineteenth-century photographic equipment and processes, Dugdale has often described his photographs as effects of reception rather than capture: "Like the first photographers, who used water from a stream, light from the sun, and minerals from the earth to assemble their vision, I learned the process of creating a picture from the template of nature. To my surprise I found that the present

could be preserved with the techniques and sensibilities of a more artisanal time."[93] Through the help of his assistant, Dugdale only exposed one sheet of film that day: "No flash; no harsh electric light; not even the sound of the shutter—just a lens cap removed, and then gently replaced."[94] The cluster of negations in Dugdale's remark has the force of denying that any useable phenomena happened in the interval between the cap's removal and replacement, something so mechanical that it makes light of the messianism behind Walter Benjamin's photographic now-time of a past "seized as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again."[95] For Dugdale, the photograph, in principle, stays at the level of a negative and not a positive: Neither latent nor dormant, it is an attestation without content, quietly setting life aside.

On the one hand, Dugdale performs a mute elegy to Keats: Eyes closed as if in tribute, Dugdale channels back the humanity of a face and the "red life [that] might stream again" through it, here peacefully transfused into the lit-up whiteness of the death mask that, in turn, flows back into Dugdale's face.[96] But on the other hand, the image seems like a flat protest, held up protectively as if to show what it wants to say: *You cannot find here what you wish to see and seek to know*. Dugdale has described to me how the decision to close his eyes was not meant to suggest sleeping, dreaming, or blindness, but rather to imitate the mask's own closed lids, as if by resemblance and analogy—a kind of *becoming-mask*—the image could manifest the two faces dissolving their distinctions. Holding the mask in the crook of his palm, Dugdale shows "KEATS" distinctly inscribed on its base; the words share the effects of the textual label of Wordsworth's blind beggar in *The Prelude*, but if Keats is named, Dugdale remains nameless or untitled; even more, both faces untitle themselves.

Dugdale lost most of his own sight in 1993 because of a stroke associated with HIV, but it would be too easy to read this image as meditating on the shared blindness between artist and mask. Dugdale's sightlessness pushes at a different form of seeing, an avisuality within vision that is as halting in its refusal of knowing looks as is Wordsworth's portrait of the beggar. Doubting the sufficiency of the "utmost" that the label affords, Wordsworth looks on "as if admonished from another world," but this world does not enter the tight frame of his spot of time. It insistently warns him from the periphery of the poem—*a* world cutting into another to expose the furrow in-between—the intermundia or interworld where other things occur, just like the small, blue sliver of space between the heads in Dugdale's photograph. Carefully holding the mask, Dugdale also tenderly caresses it against and with the

blue void that seeps all over the cyanotype—its mark of posthumousness, I suggest, that cannot be seen by the photograph, Dugdale, the mask, or by us. The image turns back to a world and a life of "first photographers" just as it presents us with a last image of romanticism— romanticism's last word—exiting through the same photographic technology that was there to receive it on the other end.

Dugdale's photograph thus does not portray but rather follows the (non) converging point where flesh and plaster become indistinguishable and untitled: Self-portrait and portrait sink into each other just as *Death Mask of John Keats* refers either to the specificity of the material object or to both figures *as* faces or masks. Dugdale has commented that the photograph also intimates the absent friend that is not there, Maurice Sendak, who let him borrow the mask only to be "masked" by not appearing in the final image.[97] The unseen gift of friendship traces the lines of lives that are unlived but still there: In the blue darkness, three figures (Keats, Dugale, Sendak) carry each other like bodies traveling through water, not beholding one another but resting side by side or *beside*—a different arrangement of lateral spatiality, "a spacious agnosticism," writes Sedgwick, about the dualism of the couple.[98] Carrying, holding, or caressing each other at the end of the world and the end of life, Keats, Sendak, and Dugdale do not know who, how, or what one is carrying; when one says "I owe it *to you*, owe it *to myself* to carry *you*" in the midst of the end of the world,[99] one already carries—and is carried over—over into the darkness of another world where any sense of who *I* and *you* might be becomes uncertain. In this way, the image retreats into its "technical support" but finds that support to be a weightless and backless medium of specificity: In this case, a cyan blue that swallows the two heads as if into a last world. One does not know what it wants, but one also cannot help but look at it washing over.[100]

What does one think, feel, or see with this "last photograph"? Nothing, Dugdale implies, because lastness, as an experience without poetry *and* photography, testifies to a life that is gone, or perhaps an indifference to the form-of-life fantastically and impossibly promised by the photograph, as well as an indifference to the redemptive eyes of future spectators.[101] There is an impersonal cruisiness that the photograph unsustainably holds onto, and in this end of the world, this evening in the country, nothing remains or stays, and that is the point: This is a photograph of an infinite finitude, an *eros of lastness*. A kind of sexy compact occurs without design in the blue time marked out between Dugdale, Sendak, and the Keats mask. The image's unforce is neither expressive nor indexical: It moves away, gives in, or carries itself over to that very lastness where things like "Keats" and "romanticism"

fall into the blue of what Nancy calls the ground (*le fond*) of the image, the impossible "backing" out of which an image is both torn and contrasted against. In this way, Dugdale does something with the things he encounters in their infinite lastness: He photographs "life itself" as something that is not given to us but can be looked upon only if one continues, with careless refusal, to look with eyes wide shut—to look but not to see and not to possess.

3. As If That Look Must Be the Last

Today everything exists to end in a photograph.
—Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

We stop kissing
tall dark strangers,
sucking mustaches,
putting lips
tongues
everywhere.
We return to pictures.
Telephones.
Toys.
Recent lovers.
Private lives.

Now we think
as we fuck
this nut might kill.
This kiss could turn
to stone.
—Essex Hemphill, "Now We Think"

This chapter dwells on what might be counted as the third-to-last line of Percy Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*: "as if that look must be the last."[1] Looking at the Bodleian manuscript (Plate 7), I cannot help but experience something resembling Mary Shelley's own amazement while editing her husband's *Posthumous Poems*: "Did any one see the papers from which I drew that volume, the wonder would be how any eyes or patience were capable of extracting it from so confused a mass, interlined and broken into fragments, so that the sense could only be deciphered and joined by guesses."[2] Mary's metonyms (eyes for readers, seeing for reading) suggest that to see is to extract, to interpret and convert the mass into profitable meaning: Ghosting the poem as a dutiful last man or a "last relic" of romanticism, she anonymously scans its illegible guesswork before turning it over to future readers in the artifactual form of the official edition.[3] But at the same time, there is another last look here, that of the manuscript itself, which Mary cannot *not* look at. Perhaps it is an inhuman gaze, a creaturely look that does not look back at us, desires nothing, but nevertheless still has the last word as it fades into the morass of *The Triumph*'s unfinished fragments.

In his study of the manuscript, Donald H. Reiman lists its "contents": financial calculations; the poems "Lines Written in the Bay of Lerici" and "To Jane"; drawings, doodles, and sketches; various "apocrypha" or texts deleted from the final version; aborted openings, tryouts, and fragments.[4] Additionally, *The Triumph* also bears traces of the drama *Charles the First* that Shelley had been researching since 1819 and then abandoned in 1822 in order to begin writing the poem. On the last page of the holograph, one glimpses another desideratum: the faint notation of the words "Alas I kiss you Julie" or "Alas I kiss you Jane" just above the dangling deletion of "~~from whose limbs the~~." What does one make of these multiplicities? Small and almost unremarkable, they are particles and graffiti appearing between the "public way" and the "way side" (43, 541) of an unfinished poem that is left strewn among its last thoughts and feelings. None of these errancies quite lend themselves to immediate interpretation, nor do they cohere with each other; at best, *The Triumph*, as Mary knew, gives itself as an aggregate to be glimpsed rather than a poem to be read. The unseen and unreadable mass jams the text of *The Triumph* like a cog in the editorial wheel of the car, evoking a kind of *désoeuvrement* or worklessness that disturbs the poem's official narrative from within and in excess of its boundaries—a "hidden transcript," to cite James C. Scott's concept, that effects "a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" and punctuates *The Triumph* like an unavowable, negatively creative *noeme*.[5] The hiddenness of this machinery starts and stops, begins and ends the "Life" that the vehicle of the triumph burdensomely bears along: "little profit brings/Speed in the van and blindness in the rear" (100–1).

Thinking about the messy relation of the manuscript to the poem, Tilottama Rajan writes that to approach it in its prepublished state is "to experience an enormous gulf between its chaos and the iconic clarity of the printed text. . . . That *The Triumph* survives only in manuscript may be an accident. But the accident is part of the text's history and produces that history as a kind of mirror-stage on which the identity of editing, of philology, and of reading is projected and broken."[6] The "iconic clarity of the printed text" requires a sanitized form of seeing on our part, a compensatory drive that disavows what it can only vainly cover over: the diffuse nonidentity of the poem in its two worlds, or what we might call, after Shelley, "the world and its mysterious doom" (244). Because of this, it is not hard to imagine why *The Triumph* has been such an unforgiving text for all of the scholarship that has tried to grapple with it. Writing over three decades ago, Paul de Man's famous question about what we should do with Shelley's unburied biographical body within the poem was also an attempt to reckon with its

disfiguring tropes of finality and lifelessness. "This defaced body [Shelley's drowned corpse] is present in the margin of the last manuscript page and has become an inseparable part of the poem. At this point, figuration and cognition are actually interrupted by an event which shapes the text but which is not present in its represented or articulated meaning. . . . The final test of reading, in *The Triumph of Life*, depends on how one reads the textuality of this event, how one disposes of Shelley's body."[7] In this hallucinatory "final test," the latter proves to be inconclusive: The poet is exorcised as an instance of an end that de Man reads through and against the figure of embodiment, but that body, ultimately, is neither Shelley's nor the poem's but a kind of residue that collides with the poem's mirror-stage, a hyperbolizing of the last that teeters between worlds. Thinking of the manuscript's last page, perhaps de Man apprehends what lastness asks of us as observers: to look but not to see it, to refuse bearing witness to false conclusions.

What if we took the brief and under-read lastness of the line "as if that look must be the last" as a very particular kind of utterance, stolen "as if" from the poem's official fabric and effectively pulling it apart like an end of the world? The line would be a last scrap of the poem but, principally, it would also push up against the lastness of the look. What would then happen to the world after the last look? And what is an after-look? The *as if* is powerfully key here: In a reading of Kant's own *as ifs*, David L. Clark reminds us that their philosophic form (*als ob*) appears in the philosopher's thoughts on abstraction or negative attention in the *Anthropology* where it acts as a regulatory principle, "a turning *from* that is also always a turning *to*, and that works to separate worlds without making them inaccessible to each other. . . . In Kant 'negative attentiveness' [*negative Aufmerksamkeit*] ensures that disinterestedness and renunciation are not the opposite of interest but rather its most subtilized expression. It means never having finally to say *no* to no."[8] In this sense, then, "to *look away from* the misfortune of others, yes, even from our own good fortune"[9] functions as an affirmation and a negation, a nondialectical way of seeing or acting upon things both simultaneously and differently. The *as if* lets things stand side by side, spinning possibilities next to and athwart each other. Take again the phrase "the world and its mysterious doom": *World* and *doom* are held together and yet kept apart by the *as if*, neither one canceling the other but in a relation of simultaneous pressure. The last look, like a last page or a last world, is a lure for just this kind of negative attentiveness: One cannot gain a place from where to perceive the last *as* the last or *in* its lastness, but even so, one also cannot entirely say no to lastness outright because it always happens, beyond and beside us. And to further emphasize that point, Shelley writes that the look must be the last:

It is *as if* it must be so. The *must* insists with all the austerity of a sovereign imperative, although in this case, it occurs without tangible authority, an obligation to be the last in the absence of knowing from where such a decree is summoned. It must be and it ought to be. And as one adjusts oneself to that mustness, one looks upon and reads the last look as an unreal symptom of an end that has happened. One looks just as one is told to stop looking: one does not look, one does not look, one does look . . .

I admit that for years, I have been perplexed by the minimal yet arresting power of "as if that look must be the last," to the point where the whole apparatus of the poem dissolves for me into something like the floaters that Mary saw in the manuscript. The words, however, have never sounded especially elegiac to me but rather quietly withering in their kitschy and clichéd tone, even recalling the countless small disasters of standard torch songs composed in the minor key—noncatastrophic gestures and affects that explode at micro-levels and dissipate, neither fetishistic nor talismanic. Like Etta James's "At Last," then, this is a love that has "come along." Additionally, "as if that look must be the last" has also been so intense for me because it affectively resonates with an earlier moment where the poet exhaustedly deplores the coercive logic of *The Triumph*'s spectacular visuality: "Mine eyes are sick of this perpetual flow/Of people, and my heart of one sad thought" (298–99). How does one approach the complex affects that pulse in these two moments of lastness, the weariness and torpor that the text both laments and yet also seems to enjoy? While both cases are of course uniquely different, one might say that each testifies to a kind of "ideological fatigue," Siegfried Kracauer's provocative term for what he diagnoses as the "apathy" and "insensitivity" of American culture reflected in postwar Hollywood cinema, where confrontations with historical trauma expose a lack of values, as well as establish social and political paralysis.[10] Closer to its own era, the poem's fatigue could be read as the objective correlative of the stalemates of Regency politics and culture, and to be sure, the poet's disdain for what he sees also betrays a frustration with looking—with a look that cannot *not* look away from the "spent vision" of a history of all those that have "ceased to be": Voltaire, Frederick II, Kant, Catherine the Great, Leopold II, among other figures saturating the corrupt vision of history that the triumph grinds out.[11] Thus when the poet, responding to Rousseau's narration of the crew attached to the triumph, cries "Let them pass" (243), it is as if the eye, served with a half-full history—a "spent vision of the times" (233)—wishes that *everything* it sees would come to an end, "drained to its last sand in weal or woe" (123). Of course, that wish itself, as Rousseau solemnly asserts, is inextricable from our interpretative complicity with the world: We throw "our shadows on it"

(251), and in so doing, we also look but do not see the traumatic repetitions of history that our revisions occasion.

All of these figures script an ideological investment in life's endlessly manufactured perpetuity in the poem, a project Joel Faflak has tracked as Shelley's restaging of "the visual's more problematic transformation of the public sphere."[12] At the same time, however, something else registers in the tiredness of that wish, a hint, perhaps, that now, finally, passing might be understood to signify not moving or shifting but *disappearing*, that *now* one might imagine forever consigning those figures to history's oblivion and, with them, a look that will be the last—in other words, a form of looking that counters the imperatives of triumphal sight. It is as if Shelley's resistance to the world and things as they are lies in this: to give in to the final fantasy of the *now no more*, to take the poet's sick eyes, like Mary Shelley's, as precipitates of a fatigue with ocular reason's feverish and outmoded trust in the constancy of the world and life against all odds. *The Triumph*, I argue, dwells with a last look, a last world, and a last kiss, but it also will end, improbably and impossibly, with a photograph. It will also offer lifeless bodies, fragments, and things that approach each other as seductive evidence of pleasures that blur the lines between seeing, reading, and looking at last sight. Lastness opens up a queer vulnerability to the world-endings brought about by looks and kisses in a poem that traverses the last of romanticism.

Blink of an Eye

When Rousseau casts an eye at the car, what does he look at? Is his response defensive or automated? The lines "Then, what is Life? . . ." and "Happy those for whom the fold/Of" serve as two quasi-dialogic units that bookend the passing figure of the last look that lies in their midst. On one hermeneutical level, the unfinished conversation between Rousseau and the poet could be said to take place—or be staged—in the poem's foreground while all other actions and events outside the quotes constitute the untidy background against which discourse dialectically emerges. If we recall, however, that the manuscript of *The Triumph* does not bear any quotation marks at all (these were a posthumous editorial add-on by Mary), looking and speaking start to fade into one another in the noisy text.[13] Throughout *The Triumph*, the poet and Rousseau hold onto each other in an intimate but alien "interpersonal rapport,"[14] an irreconcilable asymmetry of desires that confounds the pedagogical scene of recognition and instruction that looking aspires to managerially direct: "from spectator turn/Actor or victim in this wretchedness/And what thou wouldst be taught I then may learn/From

thee" (305–8). It is as if Rousseau imagines that, by turning away from a privileged mode of spectatorial looking, the poet could then look and teach from a vantage that displaces that gaze, reversing the hierarchical terms of their relationship in a world poised on cancellation. In this way, the poet *himself* would come to embody the last.

Thus, pedagogic vision is inscribed by the void or abyss that it cannot see, an inaccessible and unlearned knowledge or "education in error" that cannot overcome its own destructive thinking.[15] In a poem of extraordinary light imagery and various episodes of envisioning, looking, beholding, and seeing, Shelley thematizes the last look as a powerfully confounding concept; the word *eye*, for example, appears in the poem more than any other figure for visualization: At my count, it appears ten times, gaze = 3, vision = 4, and look = 2. The casting out of the eye is a significant topos for Shelley in both *The Triumph of Life* and in its shadow text, *Charles the First*: William Jewett shows how the poem's figure of the Sun is delineated as "a tyrannical Sun King, modelled not, as critics have suggested, after Louis XIV, but after Charles I rejoicing in his courtly spectacles."[16] The assault on these "courtly spectacles," particularly *The Triumph of Peace*, which was performed in 1633 and "arose out of a wish by City lawyers to defend the court's spectacles from the antitheatrical attacks of Puritan iconoclasts like their colleague William Prynne,"[17] would not have been lost on Shelley. Indeed, Jewett surmises that *The Triumph of Peace* would have also brought to mind the contemporary excesses of the Prince Regent. Thus when Charles the First imagines himself as the "golden sun" of the court while "the wild million/Strike at the eye that guides them,"[18] the body politic, notes Jewett, behaves like Oedipus, striking out "its own eye" in an attack on Enlightenment ocularcentrism.[19] Additionally, the line echoes "the million with fierce song and maniac dance/Raging around" in *The Triumph* (110–11), or "the throng of Life that not only obscures but permanently extinguishes the illumination Rousseau might have shed."[20] Jewett underscores this parallel in order to argue that Shelley's mobile imagery of light and obscurity depicts history not as traditionally successional but "as a nontemporal repetition of obscurings that blot a light shining from a realm beyond time."[21] If the poem works to forget what the past remembers, then the abandonment of the play for the poem was, in Jewett's estimate, Shelley's anxious "political dilemma" about seeing and believing: how to think beyond the palpable embodiment of history on stage, even as the poem "engenders an unquenchable nostalgia for the doings and sufferings that once could be found in history."[22]

I want to suggest that Shelley's casting out of Rousseau's eye enacts another kind of practice, an ending of the world that extinguishes the resources

through which *a* world is composed in order to be beheld—a throwing away or abjecting of itself as "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."[23] Even more, the line suggests that the eye, as an abject, is thrown and attached to the moving triumphal car, as if to have it carry the eye "onward" and put an end to the look while also absorbing its expulsion.[24] If "what was once Rousseau" (204) becomes the partial or fragmented philosopher of the poem's last word—indeed, its Virgilian representative—he is also quite strikingly an actor and spectator of the last look—the so-called first or radical Romantic (again, "an old root"), now become its last and eyeless spectator.[25] Rousseau throws out the eye like a futile apostrophe or address: He abjures or discards the very organ associated with the possibility of perception in just the same manner as when he speaks earlier about how we have unknowingly "but thrown, as those before us threw,/Our shadows on [the "bubble" or world] as it past away" (250–51). These shadows are not equivalent to the shadows of futurity found in the *Defence of Poetry*; they are today's shadows. They are illegible and pressing, thrown onto a world that does not retain anything of what we believe we cast upon it. They are not beholden to a future at all, and their relation to the objects that cast them establishes a doubling effect—we throw them in the same way as others before us have done so as well—but the throwing here is like a fort-da game: It is a kind of losing, a finite *poiesis* that unmakes (just as it makes) the shadows, the bodies that cast them, and the act of throwing itself. Between the shadows and the objects lies an avisual gulf that cannot be properly seen with the eyes.

This demolition of authoritative looking is also developed by Shelley on another register in the sublime image of the million that strike the "eye that guides them," an image that might be like Hegel's work of art, a "thousand-eyed Argus, whereby the inner soul and the spirit is seen at every point."[26] Like the heart that manifests its inner workings all over the human body, art must "convert every shape in all points of its visible surface into an eye" in order to confirm and see such affects as revelations of the spirit: "And it is not only the bodily form, the look of the eyes, the countenance and the posture, but also actions and events, speech and tones of voice, and the series of their course through all conditions of appearance that art has everywhere to make into an eye, in which the free soul is revealed in its inner infinity."[27] For Shelley, however, the heterogeneity of the million that "rage around" the chariot frenetically disrupts the work of art's ocular obsessiveness. Rather than convert and homogenize, the throng explodes around Life as a composite mass, an Argus assemblage, at once fascinated by and bound to Life but also called to it as a thing that cannot be seen—a Life that cannot be made into an eye. These dispersions of sight echo, moreover, a point Michel Foucault

makes about Georges Bataille's work in his essay on transgression: Rather than persist as the romantic figure of a "mirror and lamp . . . sight carries it away in this luminous stream (an outpouring fountain, streaming tears and, shortly, blood), hurls the eye outside of itself, conducts it to the limit where it bursts out in the immediately extinguished flame of its being."[28] The eye is separated from its biopolitical operations just as the "the philosophizing subject has been dispossessed and pursued to its limit."[29] Visualization becomes a limit-experience achieved via the ejection of the eye: "And in the place from which sight had once passed, only a cranial cavity remains."[30]

For a poem that frenetically begins, as Faflak describes it, like the musical *42nd Street* and "works like hell to bring the world prosopopoeically to life,"[31] the springing forth of the sun and the subsequent "unclos[ing]" of the world in the proem (9) are no sooner choreographed than made to disappear in an end of the world that wears out the poem's eyes. The poet experiences a "scene . . . / As clear as when a veil of light is drawn / O'er evening hills they glimmer" (31–33), one that gives way to a "trance of wondrous thought" (41) and, in turn, effects a "Vision . . . rolled" on the poet's brain (40)—a mechanized rolling that prefigures the last roll of the chariot of Life ("the car which now had rolled / Onward") and nullifies his gaze. Jewett writes that "Shelley's daemonized *aubade* explicitly revises a topos of revolution poetry: the appearance of the day's new light as an emblem of a new age abruptly dissociated from the time of an ancien régime."[32] If we are confronting something like the unclosing of the first eyes of the world, "All flowers in field or forest which unclose / Their trembling eyelids to the kiss of day" (9–10), the proem introduces seeing as a primary structure of being in the world and as a deliberate act of negative attentiveness (unclosing) that rearranges perception.[33] It brings to mind the following reflection from Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*: "The existence of the whole world remains for ever dependent on that first eye that opened, were it even that of an insect. For such an eye necessarily brings about knowledge, for which and in which alone the whole world is, and without which it is not even conceivable. . . . This world is the succession of the representations of this consciousness, the form of its knowing, and apart from this loses all meaning, and is nothing at all."[34] Even though the world precedes the first eye, for Schopenhauer it only exists as something given *for* that eye; Shelley's eye, like the aubade, separates and bids farewell to things: It pre-emptively "loses all meaning, and is nothing at all" because the world ends *with* it.

Does anything remain after the last eye closes? Is it a "world after the end of the world"?[35] For Shelley, there is never the opening of *one* eye but many eyes, and in their multiplicity, no one line of sight (or any one world)

predominates, which also means that there are many closings and many ends of worlds. If a "Poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth," as Shelley claims in *A Defence of Poetry* (515), his ontology of the image is also irreducible to the representational rhetoric of the visible. The "wondrous trance" opens onto a topology of things unseen—stanzas (or rooms) unfurnished or unmade, not so much noumenal as absent, forgotten, and marked by spectral withdrawals.[36] Later on in the *Defence* he states: "All things exist as they are perceived: at least in relation to the percipient. 'The mind is its own place, and of itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.' But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions" (533). William Keach points out that Shelley's post-Lockean theory of the image stressed its nonpicturable possibilities: Delinked from sense-perception, his images are often produced by an inside/outside mode of perception that (re)creates what the world does or does not give.[37] The line between giving and not giving, however, is impossible to firmly draw. Poetry operates by way of cuts and endings—it "defeats," overcomes, or deletes the very concepts it endlessly constructs. As an image of life, a faculty and a technology for seeing such a life, poetry extinguishes what it cannot bring to sight. Put differently, poetry looks at, with, and against images that cannot quite be seen; it looks upon *a* life that is unpictured and unlived, something other than the spectacle and spectatorship of Life that the triumph seeks to impose. Poetry resembles a camera: It is an inhuman device or prosthesis that sees for others and sees things *as* other, but as a thing-in-itself, it emptily looks at and registers "lives" without absorption, lives that are not perceivable to itself via its own mediations.[38] In other words, poetry does not just displace and improve upon what we, as readers/spectators of life, apparently do—it annihilates reading-as-spectatorship, provoking modes of perception that are not linked to a humanist ethics. Perhaps this might be Shelley's ethics beyond ethics, tarrying with the unlivable elements that inscribe "life itself."[39]

Carnage

Simon Jarvis has remarked that *The Triumph*'s post–de Manian critical reception, mostly caught in high-octane dynamics of tragic disappointment over life, idealism, and history, is somewhat prefigured in Rousseau as the poem's "grim Feature," which itself alludes to a passage from Book 10 of *Paradise Lost* where Milton describes Death, in Jarvis's marvelous gloss, as the "chief hermeneut of Life."[40] The Miltonic allusion tellingly extends and complicates the unliveliness of poetry that *The Triumph* mines: like a vulture patiently searching for carrion—"such a scent I draw/Of carnage,

prey innumerable, and taste/The savour of death from all things there that live"—Death "scented . . . and upturned/His nostril wide into the murky air,/Sagacious of his quarry from so far."[41] The virtuoso simile that precedes this passage is chilling:

> As when a flock
> Of ravenous fowl, though many a league remote,
> Against the day of battle, to a field,
> Where armies lie encamped, come flying, lured
> With scent of living carcasses designed
> For death, the following day, in bloody fight.
>
> (10: 273–78)

Steven Miller's phrase "war after death" aptly describes Death's predatory look on the living, which, ironically, ushers "life itself" into legibility by gazing on it and thus interpellating it—life seen and made to live by nonlife.[42] Death's daily survey of life is a belligerent desecration, inflicted beyond the bounds of what constitutes a body full of life and death. In a world imagined as a vast battlefield with "living carcasses designed/For death," human life already bears within it "the smell/Of mortal change on earth" (10: 272–73). Milton's Death works like the diarists and journalists that Werner Hamacher calls "clerks of the last word" because their "*métier* is catastrophes—preferably those affecting their audience and themselves. They are the realists of the last days, notorious prophets of the apocalypse."[43] Death anticipatorily looks to a future horizon that announces each "following day" as the last day, the last of the quotidian.

To look on life, in this Miltonic episode, means to impossibly confront the nonreciprocal look of the other as a thing. When Shelley's poet says that Rousseau turns to him as if anticipating his "thought aware" (190), it might be because of the lingering scent of death that the grim Feature smells within the poet, intuiting his own last day at hand—another one of the "spoilers spoiled" whose "name the fresh world thinks already old" (235, 238). The figuration is provocatively biopolitical or biopoetical, composed according to the trade-offs of living and dying, but at the same time, other pressures are exerted:[44] Death misperceives the inertia *within* life that neither life nor D/death can see, the deadness already there that brings Death back, day after day, like a vulture returning to its last quarry *as an addiction to the last, a repetition of the figure of life itself as lastness*. The ritual has the formally deadening effect of returning things to a degree zero on the battlefield charged and discharged of bodies. Shelley registers that lifeless repetitiveness in his poem's long exposure by depicting Life within the car "Beneath a dusky hood and

double cape/Crouching within the shadow of a tomb" (89–90) while the car's "Janus-visaged Shadow" with four faces, "eyes banded" (94, 100), drives it along. In its habits, Death is as inert and machinic as the Life it seemingly opposes, and both are figures that try to close in on a world that neither one can properly view.

I have made the argument elsewhere that a question that goes unnoticed and unspoken in *The Triumph* concerns the untranslatable "language" spoken between the English poet and the Swiss philosopher.[45] In the context of this chapter, I might rephrase my remark this way: What do the poet and Rousseau *see* when they look at each other? If the language of poetry is, according to the *Defence*, already foreign in the sense of being a medium of "evanescent visitations . . . always arising unforeseen and departing unbidden" and derived from "words which express what they understand not," then there is also an endless untranslatability or "unapprehended inspiration" in looking (532, 535). To look is to perceive something from a position where we have not made ourselves available to be looked upon. We cannot but fail under such conditions of looking because we neither properly speak to nor address things with our look. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida reminds us that while it is difficult "*to make or to let* a spirit *speak*," it is also the case that "the last one to whom a specter can appear, address itself, or pay attention is a spectator as such. . . . As theoreticians or witnesses, spectators, observers, and intellectuals, scholars believe that looking is sufficient. Therefore, they are not always in the most competent position to do what is necessary: speak to the specter."[46] A sufficient looking is one that is content with mutuality, recognition, and likeness. It respects the boundaries of things drawn together and apart like those between a human and a ghost, death and life. And it is sufficient insofar as it thinks itself just enough and nothing more, as if one could choose just how much looking one could—and should—have. I look and see *the* other and *no others*: "and for despair/I half disdained mine eye's desire to fill/With the spent vision of the times that were/And scarce have ceased to be" (231–34). "Vision can only proceed," notes Faflak, "on the basis of what it cannot see, what is unavailable to or left out of perception," which is to say that looking proceeds only by way of an inhibition, a not-looking intrinsic to the look; otherwise, there would be no reason to look at all.[47]

When Rousseau looks at the car with all the quickness of a photographic snapshot, something appears even though nothing is seen, or rather, what *is* seen is as blank as the deadness that Death sees in life, or the "the holes [Rousseau] vainly sought to hide/Were or had been eyes" (187–88). Rousseau's disfigurement is (to extend the trope) uncorrected, incorrigible, impenitent ("as one between desire and shame/Suspended" [394–95]). In the

noncapacity to see, looking occurs *as if* in a nonworld, a worldlessness that is something other than a life or a death, a form of leave-taking that is not privative. Our usual figures of speech seem profoundly inadequate here for reading the various materialized incarnations of "as if that look must be the last," precisely because Shelley is tending toward something inexpressive and nonphenomenological in his poem. In a portion of an essay entitled "The Look of the Portrait" (and that in part reads Miquel Barceló's 1994 painting *Double Portrait*), Jean-Luc Nancy cites a statement by Wittgenstein: "We don't see the human eye as a receiver. . . . When you see the eye, you see something go out from it. You see the blink of an eye [*Blick des Auges*]." Nancy continues: "The look, Witttgenstein's *Blick*, is the thing that leaves or takes its leave, the thing of leaving. More precisely, the look is nothing phenomenal; on the contrary, it is the *thing in itself* of a departure from the self through which alone the subject becomes a subject. . . . In truth, it is no longer even a look *upon* but a look as a whole, open not *on* but *through* the evidence of the world . . . it is nothing less than the presentation of a world rising up into its own vision, into its own evidence."[48] The look is a "thing of leaving," dispensing itself out of a world and as the world, a look that takes leave for itself and for others. It is unlived, and in this way, it presents its own singularity—"a world rising up into its own vision, into its own evidence." This "departure from the self" irrupts images we cannot see because, like Shelley's manuscript page, the look is utterly inhuman: It is unavailable for us to recognize, and it presents itself in the absence of our acknowledgment of it. This cinefied look brings us back to the genre of the apocalyptic that Szendy analyzes as intrinsic to cinema's own medium, repeating its end over and over by trying to film an image of the "after-all."[49] What Shelley presents, I offer, is a poetry of the "after-all": By ending the world, such poetry is a thing of leaving and disappearance, impossibly perceiving itself in its lastness. But with Shelley, that generic apocalyptic drive is tempered even further: The last image evokes the last as always discreetly *there* in its forms of departure, not quite beheld in the poem as an image to be remembered but rather as something flung away, taking leave from itself, from life, and from the world.

Light's Severe Excess

"If I have been extinguished, yet there rise/A thousand beacons from the spark I bore" (206–7). Rousseau's wistful remark calls to mind the scattered "ashes and sparks" "from an unextinguished hearth" (66–67) at the end of the "Ode to the West Wind," and similar to that poem's tropes of enlightenment

and extinction, *The Triumph*'s beacons signal an illumination and a warning against the sparks they bear. Rousseau's dream of self-erasure—"If I have been extinguished"—is subtly conditional: It will occur *if* someone or something will confirm it as having taken place, but the utterance's uncertainty about the status of its claim also suggests that Rousseau's extinguishment might well have already happened and gone historically unrecorded and unremarked upon. For Rousseau, the fantasy of beacons rising out of his spark is no sooner raised than it is aborted, with the beacon becoming an utterly purposeless placeholder, neither illuminating nor notifying but simply *there*. What is the form of this disastrous light?

In a poem where light is inescapably everywhere—endlessly refracted, springing forth, menaced, and snuffed out, only to cast itself again—perhaps the most obvious instance where it nears something close to an address occurs in Rousseau's encounter with the "shape all light," an episode endlessly discussed by critics and still mind-bending because one does not quite know what is going on. I want to focus on one under-read feature in the passage—the shape versus the sun's capacity to stand:

> "there stood
>
> "Amid the sun, as he amid the blaze
> Of his own glory, on the vibrating
> Floor of the fountain, paved with flashing rays,
>
> "A shape all light, which with one hand did fling
> Dew on the earth, as if she were the Dawn
> Whose invisible rain forever seemed to sing
>
> "A silver music on the mossy lawn,
> And still before her on the dusky grass
> Iris her many coloured scarf had drawn."
>
> (348–57)

De Man describes the "shape's apparition and subsequent waning . . . as a near-miraculous suspension between these two different forces whose interaction gives to the figure the *hovering* motion which may well be the mode of being of all figures."[50] Hovering triggers the error of self-reflexivity—"the manifestation of shape at the expense of its possession"—which, in turn, is taken up by the figure of the sun, or the "illusion of the self as shape."[51] De Man goes on to say that the "sun can be said 'to stand,' a figure which assumes the existence of an entire spatial organization"[52] and also orders the poem's world, much like Charles the First who is both the sun and

eye of the body politic: "It represents the very possibility of cognition. . . . To efface it would be to take away the sun which, if it were to happen to this text, for example, would leave little else. *And still*, this light is allowed to exist in *The Triumph of Life* only under the most tenuous of conditions."[53] If we were to lift de Man's commentary out of its context, it would be a brilliant gloss on the light installations of the American artist James Turrell, whose own sustained aesthetic experiments involve various architectural spaces or environments that address light by engaging with its material substance—buildings, in other words, that in themselves have no purpose for the light except to welcome it, to exist in some kind of relation with it.[54] "Turrell is a constructor of temples," writes Georges Didi-Huberman, "in the sense where *templum* is defined by the ancient soothsayer as a circumscribed space *in the air* in order to demarcate his observational field."[55] His "temples" are never exclusively earthbound or lightbound; they withdraw into the midst of things. "It means that the containing form has to be made somewhat neutral," says Turrell in an interview. "What you're looking at is that in-between zone, not formed or made by the massing of material. This has a lot of ties to architecture, but not the sort of architecture that we use to build everyday structures. It certainly isn't how we light our buildings. Architects make a form and then they stick the lights in."[56] For Turrell, light turns space inside out, and thus his in-between installations—absenting, deserted, emptily receptive—are constructed in order for light to be looked at, invited, or "greeted" (a term important to Turrell's Quaker upbringing) but never conservatively housed.[57] They "[grant] to absence *its power as site*," as Didi-Huberman notes.[58] A muted aesthetics of hospitality underwrites Turrell's works—no form can be directed to receive another, but rather the gift of light happens as involuntarily as the grace of the address that meets it, the point where each structure—where light and address—become indiscernible.[59] "It's not about light—it is light," as Turrell puts it, hinting that the spaces he makes are not quite dwellings at all, but *templums*, spaces in the air that serve no accommodation.[60] When de Man says that "'Shape all light' is referentially meaningless since light, the necessary condition for shape, is itself, like water, without shape and acquires shape only when split in the illusion of a doubleness which is not that of self and other,"[61] he might be limning Turrell's own pursuit of light as inhumanly autonomous, a thing that his various intervallic spaces and apertures afford but do not retain. Like Turrell and Shelley, de Man is concerned with seeing light as having a capacity to stand apart in a way that cannot be personified or humanized: When he states that Shelley's shape "stood/Amid the sun," it does so *just as* or similar to the stance taken by the sun "amid the blaze/Of his own glory."

While that is an entirely plausible reading, I think we could also say that if the shape stands as a refraction of the sun, the sun does not exactly stand; rather, it simply *is* amid its own blaze of glory. It does not fall back on any architecture or aesthetic form into which one can "stick the lights in."

In his reading of glory and light in Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," Jarvis notes that the former is "an awkward word to use simply to describe a mental state": "The history of the word glory . . . is itself an epitome of enlightenment or disenchantment. When the priesthood go up to Sinai, what they see is not a sign, manifestation or effect of the glory of the Lord but that glory itself. It does not signify itself by means of light. It is light."[62] In the ode, Jarvis notes, glory is developed in two mutually dependent vectors: It is inside oneself, and it was on the earth but has now disappeared from it.[63] If the issue of light and glory "disconcerts and awes in [the ode] because it so often refuses to be either figurative or literal,"[64] then Shelley's shape all light is similarly disconcerting because it is both inside and outside: Unlike the sun's specular eye that emerges out of the vainglory of its own settings, the shape stands in-between or in the midst of the supposed order of the sun. And still . . . this light is allowed to exist in *The Triumph of Life*: The shape is within it but distinct from it. If it can be said to occur, it does so in the excluded middle of the sun's glory, an interval that cannot be properly occupied or divided.

The shape mutely counters the hovering autonomy of the sun by taking up a position that is no position at all, a standing amid nothingness. At the very least, it holds, glides, bends, swims, drowns, treads, dances, blots, tramples, quenches. In their study of "beauty's light" in the paintings of Caravaggio, Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit write: "Art illuminates relationality by provisionally, and heuristically, immobilizing relations."[65] Shelley's "shape of light" is a subtractive force: It works by dancing "to blot/The thoughts of him who gazed on them, and soon/All that was seemed as if it had been not—/As if the gazer's mind was strewn beneath/Her feet like embers, and she, thought by thought,/Trampled its fires into the dust of death" (383–88). After blotting out the thoughts of the gazer, Shelley stresses that it is *as if* "she" had carefully stamped out, "thought by thought," the "fires" of the gazer's mind. Trampling follows blotting, a physical subduing of the fire into death's dust or what might also be the dust of the poem, "matter with no inner principle of gathering or preservation," as Geoffrey Bennington calls it: "Things may gather dust, but dust itself is not a principle of gathering at all, but at best lies only until the arrival of the breeze that will raise and scatter it to the four winds. Dust, then, may often stand in for ash or earth,

but it also has a specificity as a kind of last term or final analysis of earth and ash."[66] What is left is not only a gazer who gazes without thought but also dust without a thinker—a "last term or final analysis of earth and ash" that figures something less than thinking or, put differently, the last or *very least* of thought itself. Dust here would be unlike the embers that stoke illumination, not to mention the "fading coal" of the *Defence* (531) which exudes aestheticized heat. But dust, Bennington adds, "can always be unsettled, disturbed" by virtue of being a thing that is scattered or "airborne";[67] in other words, dust is supplemental. When Rousseau drinks the Nepenthe offered by the shape, his digestion of it refigures him as a symptom of this dust of thought rather than its interpreter: "as a shut lily, stricken by the wand/Of dewing morning's vital alchemy,/I rose" (401–3), or the "half erased" brain like the "track of deer on desert Labrador," followed by the tracks of the wolf who "leaves his stamp visibly upon the shore/Until the second bursts" (404–10). The erasing features of the latter conceit are well-known, but it is worth considering how the logic of pursuit, quarry, and destruction—like Death looking upon the living or the wolf stalking the deer—also has us think of an alternative world of unthinkable last things where discrepancies between the human and inhuman overlay each other, where the tracks of the deer and wolf evoke processes of scattering and disfiguration, a "new Vision" of interanimation, just like the shape that "its obscure tenour [did] keep/Beside [Rousseau's] path, as silent as a ghost" (432–33).

The phantasmagoria that concludes the poem—Rousseau's narrative of what he sees after drinking Nepenthe—becomes, I suggest, a fantasy of how the earth, in its dusty "last term," appears as something anterior to thought—the earth in its nonappearance. In the course of relating to the poet how he came upon the scene, Rousseau describes the following:

> "the grove
>
> "Grew dense with shadows to its inmost covers,
> The earth was grey with phantoms, and the air
> Was peopled with dim forms, as when there hovers
>
> "A flock of vampire-bats before the glare
> Of the tropic sun, bringing ere evening
> Strange night upon some Indian isle,—thus were
>
> "Phantoms diffused around, and some did fling
> Shadows of shadows, yet unlike themselves,
> Behind them, some like eaglets on the wing

"Were lost in the white blaze, others like elves
Danced in a thousand unimagined shapes
Upon the sunny streams and grassy shelves."

(480–92)

The gray canvas of the earth assembles phantoms and "dim forms," Lucretian simulacra that upend the prior tropes of the sun and the "shape all light." The amorphous mass that Rousseau narrates at the poem's end stands for possibilities of being that are something else entirely: The vampire-bats hover *before* the sun's glare, challenging the sun's teetering movement, and rather than blot out the sun, the bats bring night "ere evening" in a temporal reversal that ends the sun's own "tropical" triumph. Like Coleridge's gloss on the stars in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which treat the blue sky as "their appointed rest, and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival,"[68] there is a strange courtesy to what the bats do. Indeed, as actants, the bats trope a harder kind of materialism working in the "light's severe excess," graying, dimming, and shadowing the grove, earth, and air. One might read this as bringing, bearing, or mediating what cannot be anticipated—a light that is always already there before one discerns it as either night or "white blaze" (490). But in another, more complex sense, Shelley twists and wrings out his figures to be radically nonmediating, refusing to employ them to show or articulate communicative meaning. He traces the superficial stuff or "Shadows of shadows" that are airborne (488), and in this scattered, dusty gray poetry after the end of the world, a poetry after-all, last things are a "moving army of differences, metaphors and metonymies."[69] Phantoms are "diffused around," some flinging shadows while others dance like elves or chatter "like restless apes" (493). "Others more/Humble, like falcons [sit] upon the fist/Of common men" (505–6), or some seem like gnats, snow, or tears—"A veil to those from whose faint lids they rained/In drops of sorrow" (515–16). While the car moves, a slow and nonabsorptive looking tarries over this "Bosch-like" interworld or afterworld,[70] intimately focusing on figures of lastness like the "dead eyes" of "old anatomies" or skeletons that claim power from "this earth their charnel" (505). The poem looks at and narrates these things, but it does so only to finally entangle itself in the lastness of a scene that endlessly fascinates it:

"I became aware

"Of whence those forms proceeded which thus stained
The track in which we moved; after brief space
From every form the beauty slowly waned,

"From every firmest limb and fairest face
The strength and freshness fell like dust, and left
The action and the shape without the grace

"Of life; the marble brow of youth was cleft
With care, and in the eyes where once hope shone
Desire like a lioness bereft

"Of its last cub, glared ere it died; each one
Of that great crowd sent forth incessantly
These shadows, numerous as the dead leaves blown

"In Autumn evening from a poplar tree—
Each, like himself and like each other were."

(516–30)

"Action and shape" are all that remain once life is gone, as if life were but an embellishment on the very figures that, in their error, strive to give embodiment to life itself (youth, desire). If looking, on the side of life, has been so insufficient in the poem, one must, at the end of it all, try to look in a different way. It is as if Shelley is forcing the poem to an extreme limit by way of the "light's severe excess" (424)—a dispossession that is on the side of expending the resources of human cognition.

Aftermath of Damage

If Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* conjures a last look greeting things at last sight, Peter Hujar's own *Triumph* (Plate 8) might be one of the poem's queerest contemporary incarnations, replacing the chariot with the actual British sports car as a vehicle of the last look—a spectral, postwar commodity parked on one of the nighttime streets of New York that Hujar cruised and caught on film in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[71] The *Triumph* in the photograph is a conspicuously older model, a last thought and last feeling that anachronistically materializes on the street, possibly as an instance of what Walter Benjamin calls "love—not at first sight, but at last sight," the love that waves "a farewell forever" through the look of the woman-as-commodity who is fleetingly glimpsed by Baudelaire's *flâneur*, only to be carried away by the pressure of the urban crowd.[72] But Hujar's car, as a potential object of waning desire, is shot in a world without people or traffic, a world that is not that dissimilar from either the empty spaces of Eugène Atget's street photography, which Benjamin describes as "merely without mood,"[73] or the

one portrayed on Keats's Grecian urn where a "little town . . . /Is emptied of [its] folk," and whose "streets for evermore/Will silent be."[74] The car, like the urn, is seemingly placed or deposited in a world, registering the violence of the surrounding depopulation in its appropriated, artifactual state. It could be an abandoned object, much like the other wrecked cars featured in the *Night* series, but part of the photograph's indeterminacy lies in the fact that we cannot tell or know if the car (like the urn) is lost or found, detritus or possessed. Thus, the photograph abandons the car, as it were, by refusing to give up the auratic secret of its "location" or, even more, by remaining indifferent to it altogether. In spite of being homeless, however, the car is also a shiny and clean "thing of beauty" subject to disinterested judgment, although *as a thing*, it is just as well nonaesthetic, closed off from the potential of any judgment, much less the sympathy or curiosity of the photographer's lens. What is so starkly arresting about the sports car's state of being in this monochrome world is how it seems to appear or conjure itself. Parked close to the curb, it is suspended somewhere between movement and stasis—a suspension accentuated by several visual markers: the curb's parallel lines, the elevated railway above, the piece of wood or cardboard on the ground by the tires, and the three white stripes around the central median vertical support that bisects the photograph. These stripes are offset by the pale verticality of another set of supports on which a one-way sign in the background points to something beyond the frame. Like the compressed forces operating in Hubert Robert's *The Accident*, the crisscrossing parallel and perpendicular lines stall a movement of relations (staying, leaving) in the image, but they also formally contribute to another form of doubling: To the left of the striped median support, one can faintly see the headlights of another car pressed up against the stripes, and even further to the left of it, another set of headlights peeks out, formally aligned with the back end of the sports car. In this end of the world, Hujar photographs lastness as a nominally relational image of repetition and difference: Here, the "event" of finality and farewell, the end that can never quite end, is represented, reproduced, and transmitted as a condition of the very medium that traditionally has served to certify the last word, to offer up the last bit of evidence about a referent to which the image is visibly tied.[75]

In a little essay entitled "Judgment Day," Giorgio Agamben registers photography's indexical "last word" as a feature of its eschatological apparatus:

> It represents the world as it appears on the last day, the Day of Wrath . . . the judgment concerns a single person, a single life: precisely this one and no other. And when has that life, that person, been picked out, captured, and immortal-

> ized by the angel of the Last Judgment—who is also the angel of photography? While making the most banal and ordinary gesture. . . . In the supreme instant, man, each man, is given over forever to his smallest, most everyday gesture. And yet, thanks to the photographic lens, that gesture is now charged with the weight of an entire life. . . . A good photographer knows how to grasp the eschatological nature of the gesture—without, however, taking anything away from the historicity or singularity of the photographed event.[76]

By recording the instantaneous gestures of a "single life," a photograph bestows upon that life a semblance of its "last day," a deferred event permanently captured in its now-time. For Agamben, one of the photograph's "non-aesthetic" exigencies is to interpellate us—its spectators to come—into its "demand for redemption,"[77] and by doing so the solicitous force of that demand becomes indistinguishable from the medium's technical messianism. The photograph thus rescues *eschatos* by promising that the last, as an image, will endure as stored potentiality earmarked for release at a later date. Indeed, the very apocalyptic judgment that threatens the image with finitude is precisely responsive to the "demand" that Agamben hears and sees in the photograph's postponement of gestural life.[78]

For a moment, leave to the side the curatorial devotion of Agamben's argument, a devotion that comes with a faith in the subject's resurrection from operational life via a visual technology that facilitates that transubstantiation. Leave aside also the question of why singularities would even want or need to be redeemed at all by photography, or why the notion of a nonsalvational attentiveness to the image outside a humanistic framework is so difficult for Agamben to consider. What if photography had an entirely different kind of compulsion: not to generatively reproduce and proliferate more images of lastness for us to consume as the stuff of memory and hope, but to follow a practice that abjures that very kind of redemptive logic? Photography could have us glimpse images that dissipate and fade in ways other than forgetfulness or remembrance, releasing images that are not quite about life at all and thus change how and why we want to look. For example: What if the photographic image was like the last page of a poem's manuscript? What if it was an illegible, Shelleyan scrap of guesses that does not strive to show, index, or manifest anything decipherable, precisely because the gaze of the paper recedes from our intervening desires, becoming a thing that is as perishable as thought and reading, closed off from any civilizing "demand for redemption"?

In her introduction to Hujar's first book of photographs, *Portraits in Life and Death*, Susan Sontag writes: "We no longer study the art of dying, a

regular discipline and hygiene in older cultures; but all eyes, at rest, contain that knowledge. The body knows. And the camera shows, inexorably. . . . Peter Hujar knows that portraits in life are always, also, portraits in death."[79] As we have seen, however, death (at least Milton's Death), like life, misreads itself through the genre of portraiture: It sees itself as a phenomenalization of a rapport of recognition that inadequately covers a more neutral, indifferent, and inert kind of inhuman drive that Hujar's *Triumph* vividly suggests.[80] Experimenting with an infinitude *of* finitude, a photography without life, Hujar roams New York like the poetic scavenger that Shelley evokes, looking at the "charnel" of the earth and photographing images that are not portraits of themselves or others but incendiary last images that appear *as if* out of nowhere—what Stephen Koch describes as Hujar's attempt, in the *Night* series, to survey the "aftermath of damage" without any reparative ends.[81] "Damage" here is not promissory or eschatological: It is not a wreckage that endures with all the weight of a traumatic history but something more fleeting and differently devastating. To photograph an aftermath evokes images as eventualities, less signifiers than damaged symptoms or figures that gaze on us in their ruined status. While *Night* does elegiacally (and sociologically) document a queer New York history that has now disappeared, the more complex queerness of Hujar's *Triumph* lies to the side of this elegy to historical representation, the impulse to see as if one could record, narrate, and explicate for posterity everything in the images' visual system. One looks and then looks again at the unempathic, inhuman dimensions of the photographic image; instead of meeting our gaze through immediacy, it resists it. It is as if we are encountering it not in terms of its proximate appearance or indexicality but rather as an aftermath image in flight from authentication—a lastness that coincides with the lastness of the look itself.

To be sure, Hujar conceived of photography as conducting the experience of "waiting for the person to come to him and just being very present," receiving and addressing the other in all of his or her palpability.[82] But presence here is not quite the corollary of personification and propinquity, nor should it be a logical consequence of waiting, as if to wait were to necessarily anticipate the "being very present" of another. Indeed, waiting *within* a photograph has duration but not temporality—it is an open-ended expectation of the image as coming and going, appearing and disappearing, living and not living. It attests to the various gradations through which "being very present" manifests itself. *How* present, *how much* presence does it take to be *very present*?[83] In this sense, waiting exceeds and inscribes the visual evidence of the photograph: Images worklessly come and go; they are unintentional and unintended, truly abandoned things without any past or future. Their

present, however, is less punctual than modulating and uncontrollable—an ungraspable present in constant retreat. And in this way, *Triumph* is not a portrait of a sports car but an image with multiple constellations of negative force, "interlined and broken into fragments," that inhibit protocols of representation—a rent image, in Didi-Huberman's sense, that tears and rips itself, unstitching the conflation of figurality and literality in the visible.[84] I cannot help but think that light and dark smear *Triumph* with the same spellbinding effects as the handwritten minima that ripple the manuscript of Shelley's poem. In the world of the photograph, "grey with phantoms," light comes with its own negative (non)knowledge, or last looks: Its darkened, underexposed tones compose a field around it with a concentrated and exacting light, and while its gaze luminously draws the spectator in for a deceptively better focus, it is also a light that is simply *there*, a forbidding darkness of the gaze that does not merely offer up the car for reflection but saturates and holds it down in its estranging perspective.[85] And as if to further emphasize the suspended inhumanness of light, the photograph shows a small flare in its upper left-hand corner—an overexposed shot of a train signal (possibly a yellow traffic light) that interminably flashes between going and stopping. The light is marginal in the sense that it is literally to the side of the foregrounded car, but it also does not enlighten: It is an outpost or margin of intelligibility. It is as if Hujar's photograph functioned like the "tain of the mirror," Rodolphe Gasché's term for a mirror's "tinfoil, the silver lining, the lusterless back" that negatively enables a mode of thinking that is not reflective but the "systematic exploration of that dull surface without which no reflection and no specular and speculative activity would be possible."[86] "Touched by a bit of the real," the image is thrown to the "blank sovereignty of its vacant opening," which is to say, an opening not toward but away from itself, a taking leave of the image as a well as a farewell to seeing with our eyes.[87] This would be a queer kind of looking that Hujar's photograph releases: a look that irrupts as the last of sight.

Last Kiss

Let us continue to think of the "lusterless back" of Hujar's photograph in terms of the various peripheries of Shelley's manuscript pages, where other minor last things of incremental scale linger or look away from us.[88] The phrase "Alas I kiss you Julie" has stayed with me as one of these scribbles, something at once unfinished, discreet, and held back from the edited life of the published text as if it were an illicit tag or kiss on the paper. This quasi-autonomous last kiss appears (as Reiman describes it) between "And

~~sank~~ fell, as I have by the" and "Those soonest, ~~from whose limbs the,~~" written "in an extremely fine hand after the quill had been sharpened (probably after '~~limbs the~~' below); the word [that G. M. Matthews's 1960 article on the poem and its various discarded passages in the *Times Literary Supplement*] reads as 'Jane' I believe to be 'Julie': At least there seem to me to be five rather than four letters, two of which rise above the level of the others."[89] The fact that "Julie" could have been also "Jane" turns the name into an interchangeable and anonymous placeholder within the phrase's blank address. What would it mean if we read this line as an afterthought, a superfluous addition, or a commentary without a speaker or an addressee? Like Keats's lyric fragment, "This living hand," which drifts at the limits of a speech act, "Alas I kiss thee Julie" is a written speech act of a kiss—or more plainly, an act *of kissing*—planted after a word or a poetic line, something appearing *after-all* or after a world ends (erases, deletes) with a drop of ink. Tactfully tucked in as something small, almost unseen in the manuscript, the kiss comes *after* the sharpened quill, as it were, quietly deposited between *The Triumph*'s last lines. Like the rest of the noisy "dialogue" in *The Triumph*, it is unbound from quotation marks in the manuscript, a kind of hushed nonspeech or whisper, and like Hujar's *Triumph*, it is caught in-between the margins of various intersecting lines of sight and textuality.[90] This kiss is not much of anything: At its own scale of legibility, it demurely does not need any publicity, and like Keats's fragment, it is a minimalist object that has turned inward, refusing to make more of what it says or shows.[91]

How does the last look *look* at the last kiss, or how does the last kiss *kiss* the last look? To answer this, the key remains Rousseau: Reiman helpfully discovers elements of *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) in *The Triumph*, especially the parallels with Julie's garden in Clarens and Shelley's depiction of the visionary world where Rousseau encounters the "shape all light." "Alas I kiss you Julie" explicitly cites Letter XIV where Saint-Preux, Julie's tormented tutor and lover, mourns the "fatal kiss" he shared with her in the garden: "What have you done, ah! what have you done, my Julie? You meant to reward me and you have undone me. I am drunk, or rather insane. My senses are impaired, all my faculties are deranged by that fatal kiss. You meant to alleviate my sufferings? Cruel woman, you make them sharper. It is poison I have culled from your lips; it festers, it sets my blood afire, it kills me, and your pity is the death of me."[92] In this memory "of illusion, of delirium and enchantment,"[93] Saint-Preux writes to Julie recalling the "fatal moment" of their kiss: Having gone to the garden with her and her cousin Claire at sundown, Saint-Preux is at first taken aback by Claire's own request for a kiss. Sensing Julie's "signals of complicity,"[94] he is possessed by a more

overpowering desire that comes after—an *after-kiss*: "But what became of me a moment later, when I felt . . . my hand is shaking . . . a gentle tremor . . . your rosy lips . . . Julie's lips . . . alighting on mine, pressing mine, and my body clasped in your arms? . . . Every part of me came together under that delightful touch. Our burning lips breathed out fired with our sighs."[95] For Rousseau, Saint-Preux's kiss is the emblem of a ruptured intensity within thinking, an intimacy of shared separation. In a novel that begins with the line "Il faut vous fuire, Mademoiselle, je le sens bien" ("I must flee you Mademoiselle, that I can see"), a certain world turns to oblivion with the first kiss: "Tu m'as perdu" ("you have undone me"), writes Saint-Preux, as he is consumed by a devastating perdition that puts him beyond death.

The kiss is "the grudge at the root of sexuality," according to Adam Phillips, who argues (after Freud) that, like an "object of desire," the kiss is "a mistake" because it marks the self's disappointment over having to kiss another mouth because of its inability to kiss itself. "The kiss is a symbol of betrayal . . . kissing may be our most furtive, our most reticent sexual act, the mouth's elegy to itself."[96] As an emblem of romantic love, *Julie* has to reinvent itself as a novel by going back to the romance of Abelard and Heloïse in order to explore the kiss as a truth of betrayed knowledge—a betrayal, moreover, whose errors split the self in language, elegizing it and its mistaken desires through fiction. Thus, Rousseau's novel is not just a fiction to be deciphered but a disastrously betrayed form and an end of the world. Saint-Preux's punishing "alas" affectively imparts this kind of philosophy of the last kiss, as fatal as it is pleasurable: "Thus alarm extinguished pleasure, and my happiness was no more than a flash."[97]

Saint-Preux's flash, like Hujar's camera and Rousseau's cast-out eye, cues a love at last sight that hovers at its own self-extinction, a nonworld of exploded referentiality that cannot keep *Julie*, "Julie," or "Jane" from kissing each other. To read and to desire, Rousseau suggests, is to elegize a look and a kiss as last signifiers of a world. With exacting severity, Rousseau reads and writes the kiss as a disaster, an "alas" that sighs because it "scarcely know[s] anything": "I am no longer the same, and no longer see you the same. I no longer see you, as formerly, repressive and severe; but I feel and touch you constantly joined to my breast as you were for a moment. O Julie! whatever fate is portended by a transport I can no longer master, whatever treatment your rigor has in store for me, I can live no longer in my present state, and sense that I must ultimately expire at your feet . . . or in your arms."[98] In this aftermath, Saint-Preux thinks after he kisses, and he realizes that something like the end of the world has seismically occurred—"I can live no longer in my present state." In *On Touching—Jean-*

Luc Nancy, Derrida notes: "With the exception of Novalis, there has rarely been, to my knowledge, an attempt at *thinking*, what is called thinking, the kiss. It is already very difficult to think what happens—and just to think, no doubt, but this may be where 'thinking' begins—when a mouth comes in contact with another mouth and when lips, and sometimes tongue and teeth, get mixed up in it."[99] In one of his fragments, Novalis cryptically writes: "One must never confess to oneself that one loves oneself. The secret of this confession is the life principle of the one true and eternal love. The first kiss in this understanding is the principle of philosophy—the origin of a new world—the beginning of absolute chronology—the completion of an infinitely growing bond with the self. Who would not like a philosophy whose germ is a first kiss?"[100] Derrida was not thinking here of Essex Hemphill who, contra Novalis, reads the first kiss as always the last in multiple ways: Writing at the height of the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s, to "think/as we fuck" was at once a lament and a tacit acknowledgment by Hemphill of how the thinkability of sex, at that precise historical moment, connoted an inhibition of the erotic, the beginning of another kind of chronology entirely where the last kiss, and not the first, ends worlds again and again.[101] Rousseau's own first kiss intimates a world that has vitally ended, and in this way, the kiss is less the germ of philosophy than it is a worldless look, a glimpse without seeing that operates like "a kiss of the eyes on the eyes of the other": an inhuman look/kiss on the margins of alterity where recognition is no longer possible.[102] In Nicolas-André Monsiau's engraving of the novel's kiss (Figure 1), this "germ" is stunningly depicted: The central, oval-like entwining of Julie and Saint-Preux excludes Claire just as she must witness the heteronormative bond that fuses the couple into the reproductive "beginning of absolute chronology" that the kiss inaugurates. What Saint-Preux actually discovers, as I read it, is a darker betrayal of relationality, a derealizing, negative philosophy of the kiss: "I no longer see you the same." Parceled out in an epistolary form where sender and receiver, addresser and addressee try to exchange conversation, the kiss is disposed or cast out within the form of letter-writing where the return of an address becomes indistinguishable from its abolition—something Julie, in her response to Saint-Preux in Letter XV, herself insists upon: "It is important, my friend, that we separate for some time."[103]

The queerness of Saint-Preux and Julie's "fatal" love turns on first and last looks and kisses that cross each other after the sun goes down.[104] At this point in the evening, relations alter. Kisses are confusing touches, looks, or blows that incinerate the lives they engulf: "What about a biting kiss. . . . Are blows wanting there? Are they absent in coitus, in all the penetrations

Figure 1. Nicolas-André Monsiau (1754–1837), *The First Kiss of Love*. Illustration. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France/Bridgeman Images)

or acts of homosexual or heterosexual sodomy?"[105] In a reading of marked passages in Shelley's copy of *The Divine Comedy*, Keach points to a section in Canto XV where Dante encounters Brunetto Latini in the third ring of the seventh circle of sodomites:

> [. . . we met
> A troop of spirits, who came beside the pier.
> They each one eyed us, as at eventide
> One eyes another under a new moon;
> And toward us sharpen'd their sight, as keen
> As an old tailor at his needle's eye.][106]

"These 'external actions' (to use Shelley's term)," writes Keach, "of looking and being looked at in a mysteriously beautiful but deceptive light evoke with precise and moving obliqueness . . . the homoerotic world and sensibility of 'Ser Brunetto' (XV.30), whom Dante addresses with such reverent compassion."[107] In this cruisy episode in a Hell that is not unlike the extraordinary world of Hujar's queer New York, eyes look, address ("as an old tailor at his needle's eye"), but do not recognize or consummate with one another; bodies and desires are unmarked, impersonal, and dimly unrecognizable, at once proximate and separate at the threshold of "eventide." In his remarks on the entanglement of lips and eyes, Derrida goes on to consider how, "when eyes meet—intensely, infinitely, up to the point of the abyss," none of the relational promises we make to one another—winks, caresses, kisses, fucks—can be transparently intelligible because they take place in a tenuous world (a last world, an end of the world) that compromises what these gestures mean and what they do: "There is no day or night possible, except from the possibility of the gaze and thus of the exchanged look of eyes that meet, as one says, in the abstinence and perjury of tact, since one cannot see anything in the world . . . without the possibility, at least, of a reflecting surface . . . in the instant of this kiss of the eyes, one can ask oneself whether there is already day or night."[108] Looking and kissing, we sometimes think, require persons, things, and scenes to be lit and seen in a way that would allow us to precisely know what or whom we are affectionately in contact with. Kisses supposedly seal love and seal us into each other and into each others' eyes, as if prohibiting anonymity and imperceptibility. For Derrida, however, kissing *is* looking, a "kiss of the eyes," as he puts it, mysteriously identifying the two together as a mode of address that is avisual but irreducible to sight. This would be a kind of kissing that is not about visibility and identification—an oscular blindness, as it were, an imperceptibility that inscribes kissing and shutters the world each and every time. We "cannot see

anything in the world" because there are no inaugural scenes, pace Novalis, of worldmaking, lovemaking, or fucking. After all, we do not yet know what an eye or a mouth can do: In the anonymous merging of light and dark, day and night, one never quite knows the true images of the things one sees, touches, or meets with. One can only begin to look, to kiss, to address things at "eventide" or on the eve—at the borders, edges, surfaces, and lastness of all things.

I have been arguing that there is a seductive impossibility to perceiving what the last look shows in each of Rousseau's, Shelley's, and Hujar's singular triumphs of life. None of them can give us a definitive last word on what they see and do not see. Quite often, we want that very word, not because it helps us to read a poem, a novel, or a photograph better, but because there is something in each of these different forms that promises to read *us*, perhaps even absolve us along the lines of Agamben's photograph. "Forgiveness or pardon," writes Derrida, "the excuse, and the remission of sin, absolute absolution, are always proposed in the figure, so to speak, of the 'last word,'" and the eschatological cast of the pardon, implying a "last word or an end of history . . . [its] disturbing proximity . . . to the last judgment—which, nevertheless, it is not"—suggests that total and absolute forgivenness would be impossible to conceive because it would annihilate the world in which it would be performed.[109] A pardon that only forgives what it knows, what it sees, what it sympathizes with, is ineffective; for this reason, a pardon is the last word that can never be the last because it must desist from offering anything that comes close to a final judgment. It must forgive the unforgiveable. Forgiveness must be a gesture that pulls away from itself, that gives itself up or disposes itself *before itself*—a *fore-giving* through which one could, *as if*, speak the last word or see the last look in such a way that an end happens, but never as something we can "give" to ourselves or to others. Shelley's and Hujar's works, in particular, *forgive life*—life as the unforgiveable that is always already there, incessantly, looked at but not seen, kissed and not kissed, thought and unthought. Recall Shelley's Rousseau, caught "between desire and shame" (394): He is a strangely decrepit, offensive, and unlovable figure, but as the dispossessed philosopher, he is also tired of judgment even as he is compelled to live it in his spectrally unlived shape, to forgive what he cannot forgive in himself and in life. Might poetry be a form of unforgivenness, a letting go or empty remittance of a nondebt? Neither Rousseau nor Shelley can glimpse it. This is why the last look and the last kiss are not given to sight: In Hujar's *Triumph*, the absence of any kiss is precisely the trace of the unforgiveable *in* the photographic image—the anonymous, unpardonable kiss of (non)pardon that cannot be shown but, as a result, is everywhere in

the frame, much like the light of the train signal or the light that is expected everywhere in Shelley's poem. The last is unforgiveable because, like life, it is always in a position of lastness *to itself*. Hujar instructs us not to try to capture it with the camera; rather, we must receive it in all of its queer unlivability. Writing after Rousseau, Shelley would have understood this wager in the photograph: to greet life, to anonymously kiss and be nonfatally consumed by what we cannot look at, and to look at what we cannot kiss. In other words, to encounter, quite necessarily but impossibly, what is on the side of neither life nor mortality—what is unlivable *in* life. Perhaps it would require us to think of looking as unforgiving: to fuck the last of which we can neither see nor know, and to look at and know the last of which we dare not fuck.

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Notes

Introduction: Now No More

1. Immanuel Kant, "The End of All Things," in *Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 227.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 228, 227.

4. While Kant remains phobic of lastness in his essay, some of his terms and figures (with much different emphases and commitments) uncannily anticipate Jacques Derrida's commentary on the conceptual links between nuclear war—the apocalyptic event of the last par excellence—and literature in "No Apocalypse, Not Now: Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives," trans. Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, Vol. 1, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 387–409. "No truth, no apocalypse. No, nuclear war," Derrida writes, "is not *only* fabulous because one can *only* talk about it, but because the extraordinary *sophistication* of its technologies . . . coexists, cooperates in an essential way with sophistry, psycho-rhetoric, and . . . the most vulgar psychagogy" (395). Lastness is intrinsic to the machinery of texts and their readability, but in the case of the nuclear, there is a redemptive drive that seeks to absorb the last without remainder and *without reading*, as if one must be devastatingly brought to think and hold onto a last thought that will wipe out time, space, survival, and eventuality, all for the sake of affirming a jouissance that is "worth more than life" (408). Literature, Derrida suggests, helps us to structurally think alongside the rhetoric of the nuclear by virtue of its "relation to the referent" (402), instituting archives that are fictive, decomposing, and inorganic: "Literature is born and can only live its own precariousness, its death menace and its essential finitude" (401). Thus, the end of all things invokes both the annihilation of the archive *as knowledge* and an annihilating *inhumanness* that already infuses the "petrified" discourse of the last thought. (On the latter point, see Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996]). It is interesting to ponder the fact that the publication of "The End of All Things" (1794) coincided with Kant's work on "Toward Perpetual Peace" (1794–1795), and this overlap suggests just how deeply fears over total war and global extermination permeate both essays. For a discussion of Derrida's argument, see Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 46–48.

5. As Marc Redfield has reminded me, even sublimity can be stupid, or stupefying. For an influential reading of Kant's essay against the background of his late writ-

ings, see Peter Fenves, *Late Kant: Towards Another Law of the Earth* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 143–50.

6. In another context, Akira Mizuta Lippit glosses a similar kind of affective lastness: "A feeling of the end of the world, the end of the world in a feeling, a feeling that remains after the end of the world, an after-affect of the end of the world." "Aftereffects of the End of the World ('I ♥ NY')," *differences* 19, no. 2 (2008): 141.

7. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (London: Palgrave, 2007), 223.

8. Ibid., 229.

9. Ibid.

10. John Horne Tooke, *Epea Pteroenta, Or the Diversions of Purley* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1840), 609.

11. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, vol. 3 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), no. 3587. For a reading of this passage, see Zachary Sng, *The Rhetoric of Error from Locke to Kleist* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010), 74.

12. See W. R. Bion, *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psycho-Analysis* (London: Karnac, 1984), 165, 111.

13. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. and ed. Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19.

14. Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2005), 118. For an interesting use of Goffman, see Mark Seltzer's *The Official World* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016).

15. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 115. In this way, lastness is speculative in Tilottama Rajan's sense: "Speculation, not bound by the rules of the understanding, is the thought undertaken by Reason, which Kant says, in evoking Plato's *Republic*, 'raises itself to cognitions far too elevated to admit . . . of an object given by experience corresponding to them.'" *Romantic Narrative: Shelley, Hays, Godwin, Wollstonecraft* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 151.

16. Kant, "The End of All Things," 227.

17. Lord Byron, *Selected Poems*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Peter J. Manning (New York: Penguin, 2005), 413. For a reading of this poem in the context of extinction, see my essay "Arendt, Byron, and De Quincey in Dark Times," *European Romantic Review* 21, no. 5 (2010): 615–30.

18. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, in *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi (New York: Norton, 2014), 6: 557. Further references to Wordsworth's poetry and prose are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

19. I owe this point about the capriccio to perceptive comments made by one of my anonymous readers.

20. As if to further emphasize this point, Robert's signature looks carved into the stones at the bottom right, less a mark of authorial ownership than a graffiti scrawl. Here authorship is evoked through its citation: "Hubert Robert," as a proxy for an identity, only exists by virtue of the material ground of the painting on which "he" signs himself.

21. See my essay, "The Ruin of Things," in *Romantic Frictions*, ed. Theresa M. Kelley, *Romantic Praxis Series* (September 2011), https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/frictions/HTML/praxis.2011.khalip.html. There I discuss the junkspace (Rem Koolhaas's term) of romantic elegy.

22. Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 214.

23. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 130.

24. Ibid., 76.

25. Fried notes that for Diderot, the still life made the "artistic and presentational aspects *of the painting itself* all the more obtrusive by imposing almost desperate demands on technique and by calling attention to the fact that the objects depicted by the painter were chosen by him, arranged by him, illuminated by him, and in general exhibited by him to the beholder" (Ibid., 102).

26. Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 72.

27. Alexander Nagel, "Don't Look Away," *Cabinet* (Summer 2014): 65.

28. It would be interesting to consider *The Accident* alongside several other twentieth and twenty-first century photographic and cinematic "falls": Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void* (1960), Sarah Charlesworth's *Stills* (1980), Richard Drew's September 11, 2001 image of the anonymous "falling man" plunging from the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City, Steve McQueen's *Caribs' Leap* (2002), and Carol Morley's *The Falling* (2014). Reflecting on the intersections of race, cinema, and falling, David Marriott writes: "Are these fallen figures in an interval? Perhaps. But they are also falling in a way that is *meaningless*, that has no meaning at all, and so beyond any 'thematic' axis; interminable and incessant, they do not hover between belief and the possibility of meaningful events. These falls present figures whose pure and purely awaited ending takes place against a background that is precisely *not* the world, adrift in gray white mists." "Waiting to Fall," *CR: The New Centennial Review* (Winter 2013): 214–15.

29. D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

30. In *The Prelude*, for example, Wordsworth writes of "Characters of the great Apocalypse,/ The types and symbols of Eternity,/ Of first and last, and mist, and without end" (6: 570–72). "Mist" and "without end" are like sudden afterthoughts, things added to the "first and last" while also disputing their terminations.

31. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 437.

32. Ibid., 438.

33. On the link between addiction and the unending logic of the "last cigarette," see Richard Klein's *Cigarettes Are Sublime* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995). For another profound meditation on the addictive features of philosophy, see David L. Clark, "Heidegger's Craving: Being-on-Schelling," *diacritics* 27, no. 3 (1997): 8–33.

34. Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, ed. Joel Faflak (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2009), 129.

35. Gerhard Richter, *Afterness: Figures of Following in Modern Thought and Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 2.

36. For example, see Alan Bewell, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); David Collings, *Monstrous Society: Reciprocity, Discipline, and the Political Uncanny, c. 1780–1848* (Lewisburg, Penn.: Bucknell University Press, 2009); Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004); Marie-Hélène Huet, *The Culture of Disaster* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Theresa M. Kelley, *Wordsworth's Revisionary Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); Anahid Nersessian, *Utopia, Limited: Romanticism and Adjustment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015) and "Two Gardens: An Experiment in Calamity Form," *MLQ* (September 2013): 307–29; Kate Rigby, "Ecstatic Dwelling: Perspectives on Place in European Romanticism," *Angelaki* (August 2004): 117–43; Joan Steigerwald, "Treviranus' *Biology*: Generation, Degeneration, and the Boundaries of Life," in *Reproduction, Race, and Gender in Philosophy and the Early Life Sciences*, ed. Susanne Lettow (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 105–27.

37. In *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), Avital Ronell calls the addict he or she who does "not know how to renounce anything" (9).

38. "When past things survive, then it is not lived-out (*abgelebte*) facts that survive, facts that could be recorded as positive records of knowledge; rather what survives are the unactualized possibilities of that which is past. There is historical time only in so far as there is an excess of the unactualized, the unfinished, failed, thwarted, which leaps beyond its particular Now and demands from another Now its settlement, correction and fulfillment." Werner Hamacher, "'Now': Walter Benjamin on Historical Time," trans. N. Rosenthal, in *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (New York: Continuum, 2005), 41. See also his essay, "Ou, séance, touché de Nancy, ici," in *On Jean-Luc Nancy: The Sense of Philosophy*, ed. Darren Sheppard, Simon Sparks, and Colin Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2005), 38–62.

39. See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 60ff.

40. *Mary Robinson: Selected Poems*, ed. Judith Pascoe (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000), 352–53.

41. *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (New York: Longman, 1980), 253. Famously of course, "weep no more" is repeated several times in the pastoral elegy. I thank my great audience of faculty and graduate students at Yale on October 30, 2014, for this resonant connection.

42. Wordsworth, "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," 2.

43. Diana Fuss, *Dying Modern: A Meditation on Elegy* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2013), 36.

44. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 413.

45. Karen Swann explores this impossibility of mourning in her upcoming book manuscript, *Lives of the Dead Poets: Keats, Shelley, Coleridge*, particularly the chapter "The Art of Losing: Shelley's *Adonais*," where the figure of the Mother longing for a last word or last kiss becomes a turbulent meditation on the remains of a romanticism that was never quite alive to begin with.

46. On this point, see Orrin N. C. Wang's *Romantic Sobriety: Sensation, Revolution, Commodification, History* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

47. I also completed this book at the time of the disastrous November elections of 2016 in the United States, a seismic event that was impossible to think as anything but an end of the world: Trump's psychotic wish to end one world and replace it with another, infinitely more intolerable one ("Make America Great Again") shows just how much the end can be co-opted to serve authoritarian power and its survival.

48. Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, vol. 1 of *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984* (New York: New Press, 1997), 303–19. See also "For an Ethics of Discomfort," in *The Politics of Truth,* ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997): 135–46.

49. Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?," 305.

50. Sean Gaston, *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 161. Also see Gaston, "In the Middle," *Parrhesia* 6 (2009): 62–72:

> A philosophy after system, an interest that dis-interests, a finding itself finding "in the middle", would constantly be tempted by many life rafts. It would need to resist the lure of the manifold that could never be managed as much as the comfort of the fixed grid; it would also have to be on the watch not only for the self-evidence of the self-evident present, but also for those endless attempts to calculate on absence as an other *resource*, as a pure and carefully calibrated resource of the other. It is also a question of finding oneself "in the middle" *with edges*." (63)

51. Stacey D'Erasmo, "The Scandal of the Unmade," *Unbecoming Community*, April 28, 2016, https://unbecomingcommunity.wordpress.com/2016/04/.

52. Also see Jean-Luc Nancy, "In the Midst of the World," in *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II*, trans. John McKeane (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 22–42.

53. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 85.

54. Think Norma Desmond and all of *Sunset Boulevard*.

55. I allude to Thomas Pfau's book, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy 1790–1840* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 7.

56. Tilottama Rajan, "'The Prose of the World': Romanticism, the Nineteenth Century, and the Reorganization of Knowledge," *Modern Language Quarterly* (December 2006): 490. As Joel Faflak has pithily noted: "Once Romanticism cruises by, one hears the Victorians ask, 'What was that?!' Which is also a way of bypassing or dismissing those aspects of existence with which Romanticism makes us, as it made the Victorians, uncomfortable." Joel Faflak, "Right to Romanticism," *European Romantic Review* 27, no. 3 (2016): 287.

57. David L. Clark and Jacques Khalip, "Too Much, Too Little: Of Brevity," *Minimal Romanticism*, *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, ed. David L. Clark and Jacques Khalip (May 2016), https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/brevity/praxis.2016.brevity.intro.html.

58. Peter Gay, *Why the Romantics Matter* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2015). In his review of Gay's book in *Critical Inquiry* ([Summer 2016]: 1005–6), Orrin N. C. Wang perfectly summarizes these issues:

> Readers coming to Gay's work will already possess enough cultural capital to be curious about romanticism—or modernism for that matter. In that sense, his urbane book provides people with interesting facts and observations to deepen an appreciation of the arts and culture that they already have. I haven't looked at the other titles in Yale's *Why X Matters*, but I wouldn't be surprised if that's the dynamic on display throughout. But, of course, the very cultural capital that this view takes for granted—we could call it an investment in romanticism but also in literature or the humanities—is not at all secure right now in higher education. That investment is something that a number of faculty and students in the present academic landscape can't assume their institutions share. To be vulgar (in the Marxist sense): I'm at a research university, and there's a good chance that I'm going to be the last tenured or tenure-track romanticist hired at my school. The intellectual work being done now by romanticists is exciting stuff, but the field at many places might be facing extinction. So while charmed by this coda to Gay's esteemed career, I find it difficult not to feel that a book on why the *profession* of romantic studies matters would be much more *en pointe* with regards to the fate of reading romanticism today. (1006)

59. Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 7.

60. Rei Terada, *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008).

61. John Paul Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 41. With this point, I also allude to an interview with Sylvère Lotringer, who references an "art of disappearance" that responds to the "last political scene" ushered in by the Anthropocene. It would be a nonproductive "nonart." But quite misguidedly, Lotringer disparages critique at the expense of collective action, as if the latter were structurally freed from the "distance" that he locates in critique and thus more effective and gratifying. The argument ends up, in spite of itself, on the side of the human agent. "The Last Political Scene," in *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, ed. Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 372.

62. Jacques Derrida, "Biodegradables: Seven Diary Fragments," trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 1989): 813.

63. In this way, I think of Leo Bersani's "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (*Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011], 3–30) where the jouissance effected by the abdication of the self noninstrumentally keeps some *thing* (receptivity, self-shattering) as an ethical ballast, but in a mode that is radically different from the appropriative masculinity it is meant to dissolve.

64. Jacques Derrida, "Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)," in *Without Alibi*, ed. and trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 98. Also see "No Apocalypse, Not Now,": Jacques Derrida, "Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)," in *Without Alibi*, ed. and trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 98. Also see Derrida's "No Apocalypse, Not Now" where he makes the following point about the kind of "irreversible," singular fantasy that lastness impossibly invites, and in doing so, must also repeat: "Now, what the uniqueness of nuclear war, its being-for-the- first-time-and-perhaps-for-the-last-time, its absolute inventiveness gives us to think, even if it remains a decoy, a belief, a phantasmatic projection, is obviously the possibility of an irreversible destruction, leaving no traces, of the juridico-literary archive and therefore of the basis of literature and criticism" (399–400).

65. *OED Online*, s.v. "last, n.1," accessed May 11, 2017, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/106001?rskey=TkZxbd&result=1&isAdvanced=false.

66. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Poems* (New York: Library of America, 1996), 492. Thanks to Phil Gould for discussing this passage with me.

67. Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 115.

68. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), no. 879.

69. Edward W. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain* (New York: Vintage, 2006), 7, 24.

70. Ibid., 13.

71. Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2015), 22.

72. See Will Steffen, Paul Crutzen, and John R. McNeill, "The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?," *Ambio* (December 2007): 614. See also Paul Crutzen, "The Anthropocene," *Global Change Newsletter* 41, no. 1 (2000): 17–18.

73. See Claire Colebrook, "What Is the Anthro-Political?," in *Twilight of the Anthropocene Idols* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2016), 81–125.

74. On this point, see Claire Colebrook and Jami Weinstein, "Introduction: Anthropocene Feminisms: Rethinking the Unthinkable," *philoSOPHIA* (Summer 2015): 167–78.

75. Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 44. For an engagement with this concept in Agamben, see my introduction with Forest Pyle, "The Present Darkness of Romanticism," in *Constellations of a Contemporary Romanticism*, ed. Jacques Khalip and Forest Pyle (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 3–5.

76. Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?*, 50.

77. Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (New York: Melville House, 2007), 24.

78. Ibid., 25, 29.

79. Ibid., 26–30. Jean-Luc Nancy states that the "vestige is the remains of a step, a *pas*. It is not its image, for the step consists in nothing other than its own vestige. As soon as the *pas* is taken or made, it is past." *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 98.

80. Deborah Britzman, *The Very Thought of Education: Psychoanalysis and the Impossible Professions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 2.

81. Ibid.

82. I refer, of course, to Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). In addition, see her book *Literature in the Ashes of History* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013) for complications and counter readings.

83. Marc Redfield, *Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 33–34.

84. The title of the twenty-third NASSR Conference was "Romanticism and Rights" (Winnipeg, Manitoba, August 13–16, 2015, www.nassr.ca/archive).

85. Werner Hamacher, "The Right Not to Use Rights: Human Rights and the Structure of Judgments," in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, ed. Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 690.

86. I allude here to Derrida's concept of literature as the "right to say everything" in "Passions: 'An Oblique Offering,'" in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. David Wood (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 1–31.

87. See Faflak's incisive reflections on this point in his plenary talk at the NASSR conference, "Right to Romanticism." Faflak thinks of romanticism as a risking of rights and the forms of life that underwrite it, but my take remains indifferent to the saving power of "life itself." Why not think about nonlife, or the unlived?

88. Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 96.

89. "Tatsuo Miyajima: *Arrow of Time (Unfinished Life)*," The Met, July 13, 2016, http://www.metmuseum.org/press/exhibitions/2016/tatsuo-miyajima.

90. This is Susan Stewart's argument in her catalog essay, "The Literary Unfinished," in *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible*, ed. Kelly Baum, Andrea Bayer, and Sheena Wagstaff (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), 141.

91. Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 185.

1. The Unfinished World

1. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 132.

2. Ibid., 133, 132.

3. Ibid., 133.

4. Ibid., 132.

5. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 70.

6. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), in *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: Norton, 2004), 62.

7. Other titles include *The Sea of Ice*, *The Wrecked "Hope," The Wreck of the "Hope,"* and *The Failed North Pole Expedition*. I will be using the title *The Polar Sea*. See Gert Schiff and Stephan Waetzoldt, *German Masters of the Nineteenth Century: Paintings and Drawings from the Federal Republic of Germany* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981), 112.

8. Norbert Wolff, *Caspar David Friedrich, 1774–1840: The Painter of Stillness* (Los Angeles: Taschen, 2003), 73.

9. Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 5.

10. Roland Barthes, *The Neutral: Lecture Courses at the Collège de France (1977–1978)*, trans. Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 174.

11. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 52.

12. Kaja Silverman, *World Spectators* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 29.

13. Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet* (Alresford, England: Zero Books, 2011), 4.

14. William Hazlitt, *Selected Writings*, ed. Ronald Blythe (New York: Penguin, 1982), 218.

15. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, in *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi (New York: Norton, 2014), 10: 725–27. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Wordsworth's poetry and prose are to this edition and will be parenthetically cited.

16. One recalls William Blake's garrulous annotation to this passage: "You shall not bring me down to believe such fitting & fitted I know better & Please your Lordship." *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 667.

17. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), 5.

18. Balachandra Rajan, *The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 4, 249. See also Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994). Susan Stewart remarks that as the eighteenth-century aesthetic of the picturesque turned to images of harder (rather than finished) surfaces, novelists came to associate *bildung* with the "ever-deferred completion" of the novel, something suggestively left in its impotentiality. See "The Literary Unfinished," in *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible*, ed. Kelly Baum, Andrea Bayer, and Sheena Wagstaff (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), 143.

19. In Kathleen Stewart's curt summation, the unfinished nondramatically asserts that "things don't just add up." "Weak Theory in an Unfinished World," *Journal of Folklore Research* 45, no. 1 (2008): 81.

20. Rajan, *The Form of the Unfinished*, 19.

21. I take the term "less than one" from Jean-Luc Nancy and Aurélian Barrau's *What's These Worlds Coming To?*, trans. Travis Holloway and Flor Méchain (New York:

Fordham University Press, 2015), 39. In Barrau's chapter "Less Than One, Then," he offers the phrase as a subtraction from metanarratives that transcend the refusal of development that "less than one" enacts: "'Less than one' does not imply nothing, and yet it has nothing to say" (39).

22. I borrow here from William Haver's remarkable formulation: "To the extent that thought is not a thinking at the limit of what is possible to think, to the extent that thought does not think itself to be a thinking up against the wall, to the extent that thought assumes the possibility of thinking, of language, of history and sense, thought necessarily thinks the world as a place where thinking is possible, and thereby resigns itself to metaphysics." *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time of AIDS* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), xvii.

23. "[Totalitarian government] bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man." Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1966), 475. "If poverty implies deprivation then the thesis that 'the animal is poor in world' means something like 'the animal is deprived of world,' 'the animal has no world.' This step also helps to define our second thesis in relation to the third, according to which man is world-forming. For man does have a world." Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 196. In addition, the worldlessness that interests me would be different from a figure of negative freedom like the "originary worldlessness" that Steven Goldsmith interestingly describes as Demorgon's "pure negativity" in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, "unencumbered by the determinants of place or circumstance and free from the weight of a particular body." *Unbuilding Jerusalem: Apocalypse and Romantic Representation* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 221.

24. On this point, see William H. Galperin, *The History of Missed Opportunities: British Romanticism and the Emergence of the Everyday* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2017), 49–72.

25. On the spot of time as blot, see David Simpson, *Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 124ff. For another particularly strong reading, see Peter Larkin, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Promising Losses* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 119ff.

26. In a rhetoric that partly resonates with this chapter, Das concentrates on *fragments* as terms that "allude to a particular way of inhabiting the world, say, in a gesture of mourning":

> I have in mind a picture of destruction, such as that sketched by Stanley Cavell. . . . Cavell takes up Wittgenstein's famous comment—of his investigations destroying everything that is great and important, "leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble"—and suggests that the color that is lent to this abstract conceptual moment is of a particular hue. In his words: "Could its color have been evoked as the destruction of a forest by logging equipment, or of a field of flowers by the gathering for a summer concert or by the march of an army? Not, I think if the idea is that we are going to have to pick up the pieces and find out how and whether to go on, that is go on living in this very place

of devastation, as of something over." (Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007], 5–6)

My interest in the unfinished, however, is different from Das's in that her reflections alight on practices within a world that partake of an ethics of mourning.

27. William E. Connolly, *A World of Becoming* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 70.

28. This is Herbert Lindenberger's phrase in *On Wordsworth's Prelude* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 51ff.

29. Peter Szendy, *Apocalypse-Cinema: 2012 and Other Ends of the World*, trans. Will Bishop (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 129–30.

30. Ibid., 129.

31. Paul H. Fry, *The Defense of Poetry: Reflections on the Occasion of Writing* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 75–76. Also see his book *Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008).

32. I allude to Graham Harman's use of allure and luring in *Guerilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Peru, Ill.: Open Court, 2005).

33. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 132.

34. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (New York: Longman, 1980), 12: 1–12.

35. Susan Wolfson points out that *interval* in medical terminology meant "a phase between fits of fever" and in military language "between the ramparts (*vallum*: rampart)." She also cites Milton's single use of the word in *Paradise Lost*: "'Twixt Host and Host but narrow space was left,/A dreadful interval" (6. 104–5). *Reading John Keats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 131.

36. See William Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of Paradise Lost* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 277.

37. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992), 245–46.

38. In this way, the transitional moment of apocalypse both resonates with and differs from the eschatological form Frank Kermode describes in his essay "Waiting for the End," in *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World*, ed. Malcolm Bull (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 250–63.

39. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).

40. T. J. Clark, *The Sight of Death* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), 104.

41. On the concepts of *metakosmia* and intermundia, see Vinzenz Buchheit, "Epicurus' Triumph of Mind," in *Oxford Readings in Lucretius*, ed. Monica R. Gale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 110. I am also reminded here of Mary Wollstonecraft's bizarre and extraordinary remark in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that "women appear to be suspended by destiny, according to the vulgar tale of Mahomet's coffin." *A Vindication of the Rights of Men with a Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Hints*, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 104.

42. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1992): 15.

43. Here I am drawn to consider how, in an entirely different context, the in-between quality of Sedgwick's "kinda" bears upon her broader theoretical thinking. "But what does it mean to determine," ask Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark, "what one is and has as a thinker, reader, writer, and lover on the basis of what one says no to, or believes that one is saying no to? And again the problem: How would one ever know that one had in fact experienced or at least suffered such a missed encounter, and thus had apprehended or punctually been in the presence of the *not-one's-own*?" "Queer Moments: The Performative Temporalities of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick," in *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory*, ed. Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark (New York: Routledge, 2002), 49.

44. I allude to Maurice Blanchot's book *Le Pas au-delà* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), translated by Lycette Nelson as *The Step Not Beyond* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

45. C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 129.

46. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 196.

47. Werner Hamacher, *Minima Philologica*, trans. Catherine Diehl and Jason Groves (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 71.

48. I cite here Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004).

49. Adam Potkay, *Wordsworth's Ethics* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 147.

50. Neil Hertz, *The End of the Line* (Aurora, Colo.: Davies Group, 2009), 253.

51. Associatively, I am reminded of Sophie Calle's photographic series *La dernière image* (*The Last Picture*) (2010) where she asked blind individuals to describe the last thing they remember seeing before losing their sight. Each piece in the series consists of a photograph of the person, a text transcribing their description of that image, and a recreation of the last image seen. Working with and against the interstitial spacings between text and photographic images, Calle calls attention to how a genre of the "last image" is mediated through her triangulated structure of support. *La dernière image* reflects on the ways in which memory serves to prop up, distort, and alienate a sense of the "last image." Indeed, Calle's installation practices a kind of negative attentiveness: Images of the last are held or pinned beside each other, seen by us but not by the subjects themselves, each piece a portrait of the last unto itself. See Sophie Calle, *Blind* (Arles, France: Actes Sud, 2011).

52. Sean Gaston, *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 161.

53. My reading challenges certain strands of affect theory that interpret affect as tied to the irruptive potentialities of bodies and somatic capacities. As one example: "Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon . . . affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between

these intensities and resonances themselves." Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 1. Affect emerges here out of the midst as if to compensate for the midst's indifference to such a filling in, especially the fantasy of affect's adhesiveness between "bodies and worlds." For an attempt to think of affectless relationality, see James E. Richardson, "Lucid Dreaming: Emptiness, Reality, and Isak Dinesen's 'The Dreamers,'" (master's thesis, Duke University, 2002).

54. Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 115.

55. Ibid.

56. Gaston, *The Concept of World*, 9.

57. Ibid., 14, 27.

58. Jacques Derrida, *Beast and the Sovereign*, Vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 266.

59. "Philology is the event of the freeing of language from language. It is the liberation of the world from everything that has been said and can still be said about it." Hamacher, *Minima Philologica*, 51.

60. Sean Gaston, "In the Middle," *Parrhesia* 6 (2009): 62–72. Dwelling on terms from Derrida on the impossibility of a philosophy of systems, Gaston continues: "A philosophy *after* system would be a philosophy of dis-interest, but only in the sense of always finding itself in the most interesting of places, 'in the middle': I am *dis*-interested, divested of my own interest *as* I take an interest in 'what interests me'" (63).

61. Jacques Derrida, "Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue—Between Two Infinities, the Poem," in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 158.

62. Ibid., 140.

63. Ibid., 160.

64. William Wordsworth, *The Ruined Cottage and the Pedlar*, ed. James Butler (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), 46–48.

65. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 10.

66. Simon Jarvis reads the passage as stating that "this world, alive to him, is dead to all other humans. . . . What saves the pedlar from madness is the element of compulsion within this apparently unlimited freedom of the eye. The possibility of undeludedly sensing meaning in things or idle objects depends on seeing the distinctness of what is not our 'own,' on not understanding meaning as a form of spiritualized property right." *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 51–52.

67. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 183, 184.

68. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 302.

69. Catherine Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 10.

70. On this point, see my cowritten essay, with David L. Clark, "Too Much, Too Little: Of Brevity," in our edited volume, *Minimal Romanticism*, in *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* (May 2016), https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/brevity.

71. See Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 44.

72. Edmund Burke, "Vastness," in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 72. See also Anne Janowitz on the "cosmic sublime" in "Sublime," in *A Handbook of Romanticism Studies*, ed. Joel Faflak and Julia M. Wright (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 55–67.

73. Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 309.

74. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 8.

75. See Kevis Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37, 35.

76. I allude to Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010).

77. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011). See also Cesare Casarino and Antonio Negri, *In Praise of the Common: A Conversation in Philosophy and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

78. See Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007).

79. John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollings, 2 vols. in 1 vol. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2:102.

80. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 171.

81. Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, 2:102.

82. I refer back here to Deborah Britzman's point about Arendt's notion of natality and the unthought in *The Very Thought of Education: Psychoanalysis and the Impossible Professions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 2. See my introduction for a brief engagement with this passage.

83. In *On Literary Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Eric Hayot describes romanticism as a mode that is distinct yet intermixed with realism and modernism and whose chief pressure is "world-creating. In it the particular limits of the modern's empirical reality—its 'content,' from one perspective—are tested, reshaped, and reimagined. The 'no' Romanticism speaks to a dominant world-picture does not reject the basic ontological or physical premises of its norm. Instead it alters the dominant's content, and that alteration highlight or causes to appear the parameters of its presence" (128). It should be clear that my chapter desists from this characterization of romanticism.

84. Pheng Cheah, *What Is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016), 42.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid., 309.

87. Ibid., 180.

88. J. Hillis Miller, "How to (Un)globe the Earth in Four Easy Lessons," *SubStance* 41, no. 1 (2012): 15–29.

89. "Lamia," *Keats's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (New York: Norton, 2009), 423.

90. Daniel Tiffany, *My Silver Planet: A Secret History of Poetry and Kitsch* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 106.

91. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 72. See also Paul Gilroy, "Planetarity and Cosmopolitics," *British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 3 (2010): 620–26.

92. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "World-Systems & The Creole," *Narrative* 14, no. 1 (2006): 108.

93. Kevin McLaughlin, *Poetic Force: Poetry after Kant* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2014), xi–xii.

94. See Rei Terada's exploration of this insistence in *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009): "The point is the usual neglected one of what we *think*: whether, inevitable or not, we *want* the given world to be omnipresent as it is given, whether and to what degree we endorse it, and whether we want to have to endorse it" (32).

95. Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet*, 7.

96. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface," in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), xvii.

97. Emmanuel Levinas, "Enigma and Phenomena," in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 70.

98. Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (New York: Verso, 2013), 338.

99. Ibid., 2.

100. Ibid., 3.

101. See Michael Naas's *The End of the World and Other Teachable Moments: Jacques Derrida's Final Seminar* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

102. See Emanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1978).

103. Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet*, 8.

104. This is what Georges Didi-Huberman calls the negativity of the visual. See *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). Didi-Huberman uses the distinction of the visible from the visual and limns it thus in a reading of a Fra Angelico painting: "It is not *visible* in the sense of an object that is displayed or outlined; but neither is it *invisible*, for it strikes our eye, and even does much more than that. It is material. It is a stream of luminous particles in one case, a powder of chalky particles in the other. It is an essential and massive component of the work's pictorial presentation. Let's say that it is *visual*" (17).

105. Mary Ann Doane, "The Close Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema," *differences* 14, no. 3 (2003): 109.

106. I am referring here to Rosalind Krauss's *Under Blue Cup* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011).

107. I take the term "blind field" from Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, who in turn takes it from André Bazin's cinematic theory. Here is John Paul Ricco's description in his book *The Decision between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014)*: "Distinct from the visible field of the framed image (as in photography), the screened image of cinema includes a blind field as the space that exists beyond the frame, and that functions as a space of transit where, for instance, characters in a movie can be said to go when they are not visibly present in the projected film image. . . . It is a space for the emergence and withdrawal of figures, of the staging and transiting of bodies" (142).

108. I allude to Maurice Blanchot's *The Step Not Beyond* (*Le pas au-delà*), trans. Lycette Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

109. William Wordsworth, "To the Planet Venus, An Evening Star," in *The Poems: Volume Two*, ed. John O. Hayden (London: Penguin, 1977), 721.

110. Blanchot writes: "Gift of the disaster, of that which can neither be asked for nor given. Gift of the gift, with neither giver nor receiver, which does not annul the gift but which causes nothing to happen in this world of presence and under the sky of absence where things happen, or even do not happen." *The Writing of the Disaster*, 49–50.

111. Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 306.

112. See Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 31.

113. Ibid., 32.

114. Ibid.

115. "In other words, before you and me, there is nothing, nothing that precedes us, nothing between us that allows us to say 'we.'" Peter Szendy, *Cosmopolitical Philosofictions: Kant in the Land of Extraterrestrials*, trans. Will Bishop (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 147. Szendy is interested in how Derrida thinks through an unlimited cosmopolitanism directed at the no-places that we cannot access and that, in turn, are formulated *from* those places.

116. Alan Liu: "The true apocalypse for Wordsworth is reference" (*Wordsworth: The Sense of History* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989], 35); Marjorie Levinson: "Wordsworth's most generalized representations owed their pronounced ideality to some disturbing particular and to the need to efface or elide it" (*Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 1–2). See Liu's powerful later revisions of historicism in *Local Transcendence: Essays on Postmodern Historicism and the Database* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

117. For an extension of this critique, see my introductory essay, cowritten with Forest Pyle, "The Present Darkness of Romanticism," in *Constellations of a Contemporary Romanticism*, ed. Jacques Khalip and Forest Pyle (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 1–15.

118. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 10.

119. Ibid., 16.

120. Ibid., 26.

121. For a critique of the vocabulary of vastness in speculative realism, see Christopher Nealon, "Infinity for Marxists," *Mediations* (Spring 2015): 47–63.

2. Life Is Gone

1. *The Early Poems of John Clare: 1804–1822*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 1:393.

2. Alexander García Düttmann, *At Odds with AIDS: Thinking and Talking about a Virus*, trans. Peter Gilgen and Conrad Scott-Curtis (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), 45.

3. Jacques Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now: Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives," trans. Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, vol. 1, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 408.

4. William Hazlitt, "On Imitation," in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, vol. 4, ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent, 1930), 76.

5. McKenzie Wark, "An Inhuman Fiction of Forces," in *Leper Creativity: Cyclonopedia Symposium*, ed. Ed Keller, Nicola Masciandaro, and Eugene Thacker (New York: Punctum Books, 2012), 40.

6. Hazlitt, "On Imitation," 76.

7. Ibid.

8. T. J. Clark, "Attempting Impossibles: Hazlitt on Turner and Blake," YouTube video, 1:04:26, posted by Yale University Art Gallery, April 29, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTAasgOOKSo.

9. Wark, "An Inhuman Fiction of Forces," 42.

10. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 13. For more on the history of these arguments and their consequences, see Eugene Thacker, *After Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

11. Ibid., 14.

12. David Hume, "The Sceptic," in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985), 160.

13. Ibid., 180.

14. Tim Milnes, *Knowledge and Indifference in English Romantic Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3. The Lamb quote appears on page 7.

15. Ibid., 7.

16. Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 52–53.

17. Ibid., 32.

18. Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (New York: Melville House, 2007), 50.

19. Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*, 51.

20. Ibid., 52.

21. Ibid.

22. Catherine Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 37–38.

23. See Ross Wilson's critique of this position in his edited collection, *The Meaning of "Life" in Romantic Poetry and Poetics* (New York: Routledge, 2009), especially his introduction.

24. The yolking of life and romanticism bears upon the current institutional and critical weaknesses of new historicism. A problem with new historicism is less that it is utterly referential but that it is not referential enough about things that *cannot* be referred to: It concerns itself with retrospective materialities effectively geared at defining humanistic concerns about "life" that are ontological, and in turn, it circles back to presumptions about culture and politics that are for us—or, as David Ferris persuasively argues, a life of romanticism that "condemn[s] us to an endless reiteration of our own significance as our modernity becomes the touchstone for how the past should look or at least be interpreted." "Fragments of an Interrupted Life: Keats, Blanchot, and the Gift of Death," in *The Meaning of "Life" in Romantic Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Ross Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2009), 104.

25. Claire Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction, Volume 1* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Open Humanities Press, 2014), 203.

26. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 507, 506.

27. Ibid., 506. See my discussion of Shelley's essay in *Anonymous Life: Romanticism and Dispossession* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 100. For more on this point, see Ross Wilson's book *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

28. Daniel Drumright, "The Irreconcilable Acceptance of Near-Term Extinction," *Nature Bats Last*, April 28, 2013, http://guymcpherson.com/2013/04/the-irreconcilable-acceptance-of-near-term-extinction/.

29. I am of the opinion that all dialog *post-acceptance of NTE* is manifestly commiserative. Post-acceptance of NTE, as opposed to our *pre-vacillating acceptance*, logically equates to defeatism, plain and simple. This is a critical distinction, and probably represents a primary schism within this new body of awareness. The post aspect of acceptance could be considered THE critical distinction, for it's the difference between the sublimation of having come to terms with what we consider to be inevitable, compared to our wavering refutation of such inevitability, which still affords us a great many fantasies. It's the acceptance of the inevitability of NTE which lays waste to all else, which is why this is a key factor in determining how we live our lives from here on out. (Ibid.)

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Peter France (New York: Penguin, 2004), 87.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., 89.

35. Cited in *William Blake: The Critical Heritage*, ed. G. E. Bentley (London: Routledge, 1975), 186.

36. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, in *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi (New York: Norton, 2014), 5: 7–8. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Wordsworth's poetry and prose are to this edition and will be parenthetically cited.

37. See Simon Jarvis's reading of this passage in *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 180–81.

38. Andrew Bennett, writing about book 5, states that "the paradox of survival for Wordsworth . . . is that, in order to remain one must inscribe one's identity into the memory of others, memorialise oneself, but that such memorialization may threaten that identity since it risks dissolving the ineradicable difference between self and other. But writing as a strategy of survival is equally tenuous, since it both constitutes identity through the sense of permanence that inscription affords and threatens identity by exposing it to the materiality and therefore the *im*permanence of the written word." *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 101. See also Adam Potkay on things in *Wordsworth's Ethics* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 71–89.

39. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 144.

40. Wordsworth, "Preface," *Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, 79.

41. "The possibility that a future science will begin to make men," observes Sara Guyer, "proves far less threatening to [Wordsworth] than the possibility that poetry would continue to rely upon mechanical devices of language like personification. Wordsworth in fact is ready and willing to help in the project of making humans, a project that seems to suggest the most threatening of mechanical inventions: an automaton who (thanks to the poets) would be indistinguishable from a man." *Romanticism after Auschwitz* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 61–62.

42. Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 31.

43. Ibid., 30.

44. Michel Serres, *Malfeasance: Appropriation through Pollution?*, trans. Anne-Marie Feenberg-Dibon (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010).

45. *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Booth (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000), 56.

46. William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 455. Philp notes that in the 1796 edition of the *Enquiry*, "Chapter VII becomes Chapter IX; paragraphs are added; an appendix is introduced, 'Of Health, and the Prolongation of Human Life,' that uses amended earlier material" (xxxix).

47. Ibid., 456.

48. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (London: Palgrave, 2007), xi.

49. Godwin, *An Enquiry*, 458–59.

50. I borrow the term "disanthropy" from Greg Garrard, "World without Us: Some Types of Disanthropy," *SubStance* 41, no. 1 (2012): 40–60. I am also allusively thinking here of the title of Michael Warner's classic volume of essays, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

51. Deborah Britzman, *The Very Thought of Education: Psychoanalysis and the Impossible Professions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 5. My thanks to Ramsey McGlazer for the link to Arendt.

52. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), 35.

53. Giorgio Agamben, "Form-of-Life," in *Means without Ends: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 3.

54. Ibid., 4.

55. Ibid., 8.

56. Ibid., 9.

57. Ibid.

58. Alexander García Düttmann, "Against Self-Preservation, or Can *SCUM* Be Serious?," *World Picture* (Summer 2014): 2.

59. Geoffrey Hartman, *The Unmediated Vision: An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valéry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966), 34.

60. Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 215.

61. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Volume 1: Consumption*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

62. Werner Hamacher, *Minima Philologica*, trans. Catherine Diehl and Jason Groves (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 71. In the poem's complex epic simile (64–70), Wordsworth imagines the (dis)figurality of the man: "As a huge Stone" (64), then "Like a Sea-beast crawl'd forth" (69). The man, however, is not analogously either one of these, but the receding and unreadable spot of indiscernibility that the figures generate—the negativity of figuration. I am also reminded here of Maurice Blanchot's "The Death of the Last Writer," in *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 218–23. Blanchot imagines an inhuman "recoil of silence" and "the approach of a new sound" (218).

63. Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*, ed. Pamela Woof (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23–24.

64. One might compare the leech gatherer with the man depicted in "The Last of the Flock" (*Wordsworth's Poetry and Prose*, 40), who is gradually reduced to a state of impossible impoverishment and madness when he has to sell off his sheep to care for his family, even as his actions lead to more destruction and misery. Wordsworth here traces the unraveling of a form-of-life and, even more, the unraveling of Agamben's suggestion that life must be formed if we are to safeguard the thought of it.

65. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 8.

66. Kevin McLaughlin, *Poetic Force: Poetry after Kant* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2014), 66.

67. Barbara Johnson, *A Life with Mary Shelley* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2014), 3. On transatlantic racial differences characterizing the figure of the "last man"—as well as a powerful articulation of lastness within a rhetoric of sovereignty—see Jonathan Elmer's exemplary *On Lingering and Being Last: Race and Sovereignty in the New World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

68. Johnson, *A Life*, 3.

69. Ibid., 4.

70. Žižek glosses the gaze as "the point in the object (in the picture) from which the subject viewing it is already *gazed at*, i.e. it is the object that is gazing at me. Far from assuring the self-presence of the subject and his vision, the gaze functions thus as a stain, a spot in the picture disturbing its transparent visibility and introducing an irreducible split in my relation to the picture: I can never see the picture at the point from which it is gazing at me, i.e. the eye and the gaze are constitutively asymmetrical." *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 125.

71. Joanna Kane, *The Somnambulists: Photographic Portraits from before Photography* (Stockport, England: Dewi Lewis, 2008), n.p.

72. Brains and skulls, for example.

73. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (New York: Verso, 2003), 139.

74. I allude to Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

75. Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *Critical Inquiry* (Spring 1993): 425.

76. Ibid., 426.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid., 435.

79. *OED Online*, s.v. "series, n.," accessed May 13, 2017, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/176458?redirectedFrom=series.

80. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 93.

81. See the catalog essay by Duncan Forbes and Roberta McGrath, "Hieroglyphic Heads," in *The Somnambulists*, n.p.

82. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 8.

83. Ibid., 98.

84. See Marcia Pointon, "Casts, Imprints, and the Deathliness of Things: Artifacts at the Edge," *The Art Bulletin* 96, no. 2 (2014): 176. I disagree, however, with Pointon's follow-up point that the "temporality of the death mask is determined not by life cycles, habitudes, weather conditions, social practices but by biology tout court."

85. On this point, see Colebrook's discussion of Kane in *Death of the PostHuman*, 147ff.

86. John Dugdale, personal communication, February 8, 2016.

87. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2004), 81.

88. Ibid.

89. John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollings, 2 vols. in 1 vol. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 2:359.

90. This line is from "In Drear-Night December," in *Keats's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (New York: Norton, 2009), 105.

91. Karen Swann, "Keats's Mask," in *Minimal Romanticism*, *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, ed. David L. Clark and Jacques Khalip (May 2016), https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/brevity/praxis.2016.brevity.swann.html.

92. Rei Terada, "Looking at the Stars Forever," *Studies in Romanticism* (Summer 2011): 301.

93. The John Dugdale Studio, http://johndugdalestudio.com/intro, accessed February 11, 2016.

94. Quoted in Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy, or The History of Photography Part 1* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2015), 158. Silverman reads Dugdale's photograph as an instance of her theory of analogic receptivity, and in an implicitly Keatsian move, she refers to him in a final chapter entitled "Posthumous Presence" (135–59). I have been much influenced by her study and engage with it in this brief reflection on Dugdale.

95. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, *1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 390.

96. I allude, of course, to the "This living hand" fragment (*Keats's Poetry and Prose*, 378):

> This living hand, now warm and capable
> Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
> And in the icy silence of the tomb,
> So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
> That thou wouldst wish thine own heart dry of blood
> So in my veins red life might stream again,
> And thou be conscience-calm'd—see here it is—
> I hold it towards you.

97. Personal communication, February 28, 2016.

98. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 8.

99. Jacques Derrida, "Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue—Between Two Infinities, the Poem," in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 158.

100. Rosalind Krauss, *Under Blue Cup* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 18.

101. My thanks to James Martel for this point.

3. As If That Look Must Be the Last

1. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 546. Unless otherwise noted, all references to Shelley's poetry and prose are to this edition and will be parenthetically cited.

2. Quoted in Donald H. Reiman, *Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": A Critical Study* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1965), 119. She writes this in a footnote to her "Notes on Poems Written in 1822" in the *Poetical Works* (1839).

3. I cite here Mary's well-known journal entry from May 14, 1824: "The last man! Yes I may well describe that solitary being's feelings, feeling myself as the last relic of a

beloved race, my companions extinct before me." See *Journals of Mary Shelley*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 2:476–77.

4. Reiman, *Shelley's "The Triumph of Life,"* 226–27.

5. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), xii.

6. Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 341.

7. Paul de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 120–21.

8. David L. Clark, "We 'Other Prussians': Bodies and Pleasures in De Quincey and Late Kant," *European Romantic Review* 14, no. 2 (2003): 266.

9. Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. and ed. Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 20.

10. Siegfried Kracauer, *Siegfried Kracauer's American Writings: Essays on Film and Popular Culture*, ed. Johannes von Moltke and Kristy Rawson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 79.

11. On this latter argument about post-Waterloo stagnation, see Rei Terada, "Looking at the Stars Forever," *Studies in Romanticism* (Summer 2011): 275–309, and Joel Faflak, "The Difficult Education of Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 58 (2009): 53–78. The title of his brilliant and indispensable essay refers to Deborah Britzman's study, *After-Education: Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, and Psychoanalytic Histories of Learning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

12. See Joel Faflak, "Dancing in the Dark with Shelley," in *Constellations of a Contemporary Romanticism*, ed. Jacques Khalip and Forest Pyle (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 167–68.

13. On this point, see Faflak, "Difficult Education," 60ff, and Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading*, 346ff.

14. Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 96.

15. "Education in error" is a phrase from Shelley's essay "On Life," 507. Forest Pyle remarks that *The Triumph* produces a seismic "break" with the imagination that leads to an "'education in error': no longer as a critical consciousness learning to destroy error and the roots of error but as an 'education' bound to error, issuing from error itself." *The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 97.

16. William Jewett, *Fatal Autonomy and the Rhetoric of Agency* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 227.

17. Ibid., 232.

18. Percy Shelley, "Charles the First," in *Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1988), 496. All citations to the play refer to this edition.

19. Ibid., 244. I am reminded here of Marcel Hénaff's extraordinary comparison of the libertine's body in Sade as a "precipitate" of "extremist Occidental reason . . . a lidless eye worn out with seeing and being seen, a set of gears in a shroud of glass." *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body*, trans. Xavier Callahan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 288.

20. Jewett, *Fatal Autonomy*, 244.

21. Ibid., 232.

22. Ibid., 253, 252.

23. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Samuel Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

24. As an aside, one can compare this moment to a similar inhuman looking in Wordsworth's "The Baker's Cart," one of the lyric fragments that was cannibalized by *The Ruined Cottage*:

> While in the road I stood
> Pursuing with involuntary look
> The wain now seen no longer, to my side
> [ ] came, a pitcher in her hand
> Filled from the spring; she saw what way my eyes
> Were turn'd, and in a low and fearful voice
> By misery and rumination deep
> Tied to dead things, and seeking sympathy
> She said, "That waggon does not care for us."
> The words were simple, but her look and voice
> Made up their meaning, and bespoke a mind
> Which being long neglected, and denied
> The common food of hope was now become
> Sick and extravagant.
>
> (*The Ruined Cottage* and *The Pedlar*, ed. James Butler [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979], 463)

To wonder whether the wagon does or does not care "for us" is to link sympathy and personification, something the poem registers as hallucinatory. The main speaker's oddly "involuntary look" evokes an obligatory kind of sight—a coerced looking *at* the world as a condition of traditional morality.

25. Jewett compares the blank holes of Rousseau with a passage from *Charles the First* where Alexander Leighton, the Puritan doctor and preacher who attacked the Church of Scotland in pamphlets and was viciously tortured, appears gruesomely disfigured in the (anti)masque that begins the play, and speaks to the Third Citizen:

> I *was* Leighton: what
> I *am* thou seest. And yet turn thine eyes,
> And with thy memory look on thy friend's mind,
> Which is unchanged, and where is written deep
> The sentence of my judge.
>
> (490)

If Leighton hopes that the horrific "error" of torture—the error of assuming that bodily destruction methodizes the elimination of virtual freedom—can be averted by literally turning one's eyes away from the memory of the face and toward the "friend's mind" where the future penalty for his torturers is proleptically inscribed or "written deep," it is also the case that, as Jewett writes, the temporariness of Leighton's physical "markings" is rendered "permanent" in Rousseau: "[He] has no eyes

to turn" (244). But Rousseau's eyelessness is not merely about his incapacity to see: He transmutes into something beyond human personhood altogether, something the poem intimates by referring to Rousseau as *it* ("And that the holes it vainly sought to hide/Were or had been eyes" [187–88]), making him more like a Lucretian simulacrum, a ghost of himself and of his past history, taken up into the *Triumph*'s swerving materialism.

26. G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010), 1:153–54.

27. Ibid., 153, 154.

28. Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: Free Press, 1998), 81.

29. Ibid., 82.

30. Ibid., 81–82.

31. See Faflak, "Dancing in the Dark with Shelley," 168.

32. Jewett, *Fatal Autonomy*, 225.

33. See Kaja Silverman's *World Spectators* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000): "It is, as I have argued, primarily by looking that we speak our language of desire. Our libidinal speech acts consequently consist more often of images than of words. But the look has chronological as well as affective priority over the word. Not only do we begin seeing before we can speak, but it is also due to a specifically visual imperative that we turn to language. Words are born out of our desire to make available to consciousness what would otherwise remain fully beyond our knowledge: what we have already seen and what we hope yet to see" (101).

34. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 1:30.

35. Jacques Derrida, "Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue—Between Two Infinities, the Poem," in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, ed. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 140.

36. For a brilliant discussion of the figure of the unmade, see John Paul Ricco, *The Decision between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

37. See William Keach, *Shelley's Style* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 42–78.

38. With "*a* life," I allude to Gilles Deleuze's essay "Immanence: A Life," in *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 25–33.

39. Jean-Louis Comolli makes this argument in another context: "At the very same time that it is thus fascinated and gratified by the multiplicity of scopic instruments which lay a thousand views beneath its gaze, the human eye loses its immemorial privilege; the mechanical eye of the photographic machine now sees *in its place*, and in certain aspects with more sureness. The photograph stands as at once the triumph and the grave of the eye." "Machines of the Visible," in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (London: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 123. It should be clear, however, that I am interested in other modes of perception that do not simply displace the eye but have us look in another way entirely.

40. Simon Jarvis, "Prolegomenon to the Remnants: Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life,'" in *Romanticism and Philosophy: Thinking with Literature*, ed. Sophie Laniel-Musitelli and Thomas Constantinesco (New York: Routledge, 2015), 102.

41. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Poems of John Milton*, eds. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (New York: Longman, 1980), 10: 267–69, 10: 279–81. Further citations will be given parenthetically.

42. Steven Miller, *War after Death: On Violence and Its Limits* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

43. Werner Hamacher, "Journals, Politics," trans. Peter Burgard et al., in *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 439.

44. On this point, see Sara Guyer, *Reading with John Clare: Biopoetics, Sovereignty, Romanticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

45. Jacques Khalip, *Anonymous Life: Romanticism and Dispossession* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 184.

46. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 11.

47. Faflak, "Difficult Education," 59. See also Silverman:

> We do not so much look in the mode of showing as *show* our look. For the most part, there is no spectator to receive what we display. However, when we address our showing saying either to the symbolic Other, or to others as such, they are able to see not only *what* we see but *how* we see. In so doing they provide us with something no dream can ever give us: the perspective from which we, too, can look at our look. Showing saying is thus finally as disclosive of the specificity of our particular perceptual passion as it is of the world. (*World Spectators*, 125)

48. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 245.

49. In *Apocalypse-Cinema: 2012 and Other Ends of the World*, trans. Will Bishop (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), Peter Szendy describes the literal end of Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* as responding to the cinematic demand that "the last image be the very last image, that is, the last *of them all*—of all past, present, or future images" (2). In this way, the film presents us with "*a cinema of the after-all*" (3), a cinema that does not merely survive after the annihilation of the planet but rather a cinema that tears at representation—a negativity at the very "core" of the medium's own aspiration to represent the world.

50. de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," 108–9; emphasis added.

51. Ibid., 109.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., 111.

54. For examples of Turrell's work, see his homepage: http://jamesturrell.com/.

55. Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Man Who Walked in Color*, trans. Drew S. Burk (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2017), 34–35.

56. Elaine A. King, "Into the Light: A Conversation with James Turrell," *Sculpture* 21, no. 9 (November 2002), http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag02/nov02/turrell/turrell.shtml.

57. See Michael Hue-Williams, "Wordless Thought," in *James Turrell: A Life in Light* (Paris: Somogy, 2006), 10.

58. Didi-Huberman, *The Man Who Walked in Color*, 36.

59. For example, the *Mendota Stoppages* took place in the Mendota Hotel, bought by Turrell in Ocean Park, California. One could read this work as an installation of hospitality.

60. Quoted in Patricia Failing, "It's Not about Light—It Is Light," *ARTnews*, September 4, 2013, http://www.artnews.com/2013/09/04/assessing-james-turrell/.

61. de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," 109.

62. Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 202. See my discussion of glory and triumph in "Triumph," *Political Concepts* (Summer 2016), www.politicalconcepts.org.

63. Ibid., 202.

64. Ibid., 204.

65. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 72.

66. Geoffrey Bennington, "Dust," *The Oxford Literary Review* 34, no. 1 (2012): 26.

67. Ibid., 27.

68. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: Norton, 2004), 77.

69. Tilottama Rajan, "The Gothic Matrix: Shelley between the Symbolic and Romantic," in *Percy Shelley and the Delimitation of the Gothic*, ed. David Brookshire, *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* (November 2015). https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/gothic_shelley/praxis.gothic_shelley. 2015.rajan.html.

70. Ibid.

71. In the press release for the *Night* photographs, the Matthew Marks Gallery describes the series thus:

> [Hujar's] urban nighttime photographs comprise a significant portion of his life's work, taking such varied subjects as Wall Street's corporate architecture, costumed Halloween partygoers, dilapidated domestic interiors, cruisy city parks, barren loading docks, and trash-strewn parking lots. Hujar photographed the World Trade Center when it was still new, the Meatpacking District when it still lived up to its name, and the West Side Highway before the coming of Battery Park City. Sometimes playful, often bleak, these photographs have an underlying sadness that is bound up in the palpable mortality of all Hujar's subjects, from late-night revelers to the shifting, often decaying urban landscape.
>
> "Peter Hujar, *Night*," Matthew Marks Gallery, http://www.matthewmarks.com/new-york/exhibitions/2005-01-15_peter-hujar/, accessed December 20, 2015.

72. Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 169.

73. For Benjamin, Atget broke away from the auratic and opened up an *inhuman* perception of images that were brought to the fore in a photography of the unremarkable and overlooked:

> Atget almost always passed by the "great sights and so-called landmarks." What he did not pass by was a long row of boot lasts; or the Paris courtyards, where from night to morning the handcarts stand in serried ranks; or the tables after people have finished eat-

> ing and left, the dishes not yet cleared away—as they exist by the hundreds of thousands at the same hour; or the brothel at No. 5, Rue —, whose street number appears, gigantic, at four different places on the building's facade. Remarkably, however, almost all these pictures are empty . . . the city in these pictures looks cleared out, like a lodging that has not yet found a new tenant. It is in these achievements that Surrealist photography sets the scene for a salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings. It gives free play to the politically educated eye, under whose gaze all intimacies are sacrificed to the illumination of detail. ("Little History of Photography," in *Selected Writings: Volume 2, 1927–1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al., ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999], 519)

74. *Keats's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (New York: Norton, 2009), 462.

75. In his reading of *The Triumph of Life* ("Living On/Borderlines," trans. James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism* [New York: Continuum, 1979], 75–176), Derrida offers the possibility of reading things doubly, at once dialectically and nondialectically, by composing a long footnote to the essay that runs the length of the piece as a contrapuntal reflection. "Let them also read this band as a telegram or a film for developing (a film 'to be processed,' in English?): a procession underneath the other one, and going past it *in silence*, as if it did not see it, as if it had nothing to do with it, a double band, a 'double bind,' and a blindly jealous double" (77–78). Going past in silence underneath the procession, a kind of hidden transcript is contrapuntally (and invisibly) performed, neither current seen by the other. Derrida's night parade has something in common with Hujar's car beneath the train tracks—a triumph takes place, but without any recognition of what is transpiring. The photograph exhausts itself even as it tries to endure and move on.

76. Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 23, 24, 25.

77. Ibid., 26.

78. Gesture, for Agamben, performatively accomplishes the relinquishing of the body from its instrumental uses: As a kind of virtualized action or movement, it extracts and safeguards human life from the everydayness of the fallen world. See Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," in *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 49–60.

79. Susan Sontag, introduction to *Portraits in Life and Death by Peter Hujar* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976), n.p.

80. See Hujar's Palermo photographs in *Portraits in Life and Death*, which eerily juxtapose with the concluding images in Shelley's *Triumph*.

81. Personal communication, January 15, 2016. I am very much indebted to Mr. Koch, executor of the Peter Hujar Estate, for his extended conversation with me.

82. Quoted in Cynthia Carr, "The Poverty of Peter Hujar," in *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 188.

83. I am tempted to imagine this as a more radical way of thinking about the terms of Marina Abramović's piece *The Artist Is Present*, which was performed between March 14 and May 31, 2010, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

84. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, trans. John Goodman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

85. At once holding back and pulling the *Triumph* in several directions, Hujar's night evokes an ethical and epistemological quandary that is also heard in Blanchot's reading of the myth of Orpheus. By turning back toward Eurydice, Orpheus's "forbidden gaze . . . destines [him] to lose everything: not only himself, not only day's reality, but night's essence." Orpheus's relation to his work depends on *not* turning back to Eurydice in order to keep to the work implied in his gaze, but in order that he "carry the work beyond what assures it," the look must be broken or forgotten. "In this gaze, the work is lost. . . . Thus it is only in that look that the work can surpass itself, be united with its origin and consecrated in impossibility." Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1989), 174.

86. Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 6.

87. Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, 140, 154.

88. I allude, of course, to Terada's *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

89. Reiman, *Shelley's "The Triumph of Life,"* 211.

90. Quoted in Carr, *Fire in the Belly*: "'I want to be discussed in hushed tones. When people talk about me, I want them to be whispering '*Peter Hujar*'" (187).

91. On this point, see the sculptural steel furniture of Topher Gent, www.topher gent.com.

92. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, or The New Heloise: Letters of Two Lovers Who Live in a Small Town at the Foot of the Alps*, trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1997), 51.

93. Ibid., 51.

94. Ibid., 52.

95. Ibid.

96. Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 100.

97. Rousseau, *Julie*, 52. I am indebted here to an extended conversation with Ourida Mostefai on the significance of the kiss in *Julie*.

98. Ibid.

99. Jacques Derrida, *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 306.

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Index

affect, 13, 30, 53, 77, 80; affective, 8, 38; affective surplus, 9, 12, 24; affectless, 40, 117n53; melancholy, 58, 67; theory, 116n53. *See also* feeling; trauma
Agamben, Giorgio, 26, 30, 132n78; and life 49, 61–62, 124n64; and photography, 92–93, 101. *See also under* unlived
Anthropocene, 15–17, 110n61. *See also under* inhuman
apocalypse, 7, 83, 115n38
Apter, Emily, 39, 60
Arendt, Hannah, 57, 60, 114n23. *See also under* world
Atget, Eugène, 91, 131n73

Barrau, Aurélian. *See under* Nancy, Jean-Luc
Barthes, Roland, 10, 22; *A Lover's Discourse*, 20–21, 26, 38; and the photograph, 11, 21, 68, 120n107
Bataille, Georges, 64, 81
Benjamin, Walter, 7, 26, 48; *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 66–67; and photography, 71, 91, 131n73
Bennett, Andrew, 123n38
Bennington, Geoffrey, 88–89
Bersani, Leo, 110n63; and Ulysse Dutoit, 88
Bion, Wilfred, 3
biopolitics, 53, 61, 81, 83
Blake, William, 51, 55, 66, 69, 113n16
Blanchot, Maurice, 22, 124n62, 133n85; and disaster, 120n110. See also *désoeuvrement*
Brassier, Ray, 2–3, 59
Britzman, Deborah, 17, 60, 118n82, 127n11
Burke, Edmund, 34
Byron, G. Gordon, Lord, xi, 4

Calle, Sophie, 116n51
Carroll, Lewis, 63–64
Cavell, Stanley, 43, 51–52, 114n26; and lastness, 14, 16–17
Cheah, Pheng, 37
cinema, 77, 107n28, 120n107. *See also under* disaster; Szendy, Peter
Clare, John, 11, 46–47
Clark, David L., 12, 76; and Stephen M. Barber, 116n43
Clark, T. J., 27, 48
Colebrook, Claire, 15, 53–55
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 2, 3, 51, 66, 69; *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, 21, 90
commodity, 21, 35, 37, 91

Das, Veena, 25, 114n26
de Man, Paul, 5, 18, 75–76; and *The Triumph of Life*, 82, 86–87
De Quincey, Thomas, 7
D'Erasmo, Stacey, 10
Deleuze, Gilles, 5, 129n38; and Félix Guattari, 6–7, 33, 56
Derrida, Jacques, 47, 50–51, 57, 84, 112n86, 117n60, 120n115; and biodegradables, 13–14; *Learning to Live Finally*, 16–17; "No Apocalypse, Not Now," 105n4, 111n64; *On Touching*, 98, 100–1; on *The Triumph of Life*, 132n75. *See also under* world
désoeuvrement, 63, 75; unworking, 25; worklessness, 94. *See also* inoperative
Dickinson, Emily, 14–15, 19

Diderot, Denis, 5, 107n25
Didi-Huberman, Georges, 87, 95, 119n104
disappearance, 57–58, 65, 78; and appearance, 13, 68, 94; and lastness, 7, 16, 23, 85, 110n6; and romanticism, xi, 11, 44. *See also* perishing
disaster, 40, 62, 77; and biodegradables, 14; dwelling in, 54, 55; ecological, 7; film, 4, 9, 38; and the kiss, 97. *See also under* Blanchot, Maurice; ruin
Doane, Mary Ann, 40
Drumright, Daniel, 54–55
Dugdale, John, 11, 53, 70–73, 126n94
Dutoit, Ulysse. *See under* Bersani, Leo
Düttmann, Alexander García, 47, 50, 62

ecological, 9, 39, 49, 53. *See also under* disaster
Edelman, Lee, 28, 60
embodiment, xi, 79, 91; disembodied, 59
Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 14
ending, 19, 31, 57, 107n28; an end, 7, 77, 101; of history, 101; and Immanuel Kant, 1–4; of life, 24, 31, 61, 68–70, 72; of the look, 80; of man, 66; and photography, 92; and poetry, 82, 85, 90; of things, 14, 62, 105n4; of the world, 1, 15–16, 29–32, 44, 72, 76–82, 90–100, 109n47 (*see also* extinction)
event, the, 4, 16, 54, 76, 92, 105n4, 109n47; nonevent, 2, 18, 21, 27; and photography, 93; and romanticism, 12
Ewen, Paterson: *Close Up of a Planet with Three Satellites*, 10, 40–41, 43
extinction, 2–4, 39, 53, 70, 85–86, 97; near term, 54–55; and romanticism, 7, 9, 11, 12, 110n58; thought of, 19

Faflak, Joel, 78, 81, 84, 109n56, 112n87
feeling; 4, 8, 54, 62, 66, 67; end of, 2; of existence, 55, 60, 62; last, xi–2, 58, 70, 75, 91, 106n6; unfeelingness, 25. *See also under* inhuman
Ferrara, Abel, 4
Ferris, David, 122n24
Foucault, Michel, 9, 80–81
François, Anne-Lise, 13, 35
Fried, Michael, 5, 107n25
Friedrich, Caspar David, 10, 21–24, 36
Fry, Paul, 25
Fuss, Diana, 8

Gasché, Rodolphe, 95
Gaston, Sean, 10, 30, 109n50, 117n60
Gay, Peter, 12, 110n58
Gent, Topher, 133n91
Godwin, William, 11, 53, 58–62
Goffman, Erving, 3
Goldsmith, Steven, 114n23
Goodman, Kevis, 35
Gregg, Melissa, 117n53
Guattari, Félix. *See under* Deleuze, Gilles
Guyer, Sara, 123n41

Hamacher, Werner, 7, 17, 28, 64, 83, 108n38, 117n59
Hartman, Geoffrey, 63
Haver, William, 114n22
Hayot, Eric, 118n83
Hazlitt, William, 22, 48–49, 52
Hegel, G.W. F., 7, 65, 80
Heidegger, Martin, 24, 27, 32, 114n23
Hemphill, Essex, 98
Hénaff, Marcel, 127n19
Hertz, Neil, 29
Hillis Miller, J., 37
Horne Tooke, John, 2
Hujar, Peter, 11; *Night*, 131n71; *Triumph*, 11, 91–102, 132n75, 132n80, 133n85
humanism, 13, 16, 18, 60, 93; ethics, 82. *See also* romanticism: and life
Hume, David, 11, 57, 62, 69. *See also* indifference: Humean

imagination, 1, 2, 14, 21, 34, 127n15
indifference, 5, 8, 13, 47–49, 54, 64; and William Godwin, 58–62; Humean,

50–52; of life, 53, 70, 112n87; and photography, 68, 72, 92, 94; planetary, 38; of thought, 2, 63; of the unfinished, 23. *See also* affect: affectless
inhuman, 11, 20, 41, 42, 87, 94; and the Anthropocene, 9, 16; feeling, 57; and the human, 89; and language, 70, 105n4; and the look, 40, 43, 74, 85, 98, 128n24; and materiality, 18, 38; and modernity, 7; and photography, 94, 95, 131n73; and poetry, 82; and refusal, 60; and romanticism, 12; and temporality, 26, 69; and thought, 4, 17; world, 5, 8, 36, 37, 45, 49
inoperative, 2, 11, 13, 25, 67

Jarvis, Simon, 82, 88, 117n66
Jewett, William, 79, 81, 128n25
Johnson, Barbara, 66

Kane, Joanna, 11; *The Somnambulists*, 53, 66–69
Kant, Immanuel, 9, 43, 49, 77; *Critique of Pure Reason*, 30–31, 106n15; "The End of All Things," 1–6, 15, 19, 62, 66, 70, 105n4. *See also* negative: attention
Keach, William, 82, 100
Keats, John, 8, 36, 53, 66, 92, 96; *Lamia*, 37–38, 43; last letter, 69–70. *See also* Dugdale, John; posthumous: existence
Kermode, Frank, 115n38
Koch, Stephen, 94
Kracauer, Siegfried, 67, 77

Lacan, Jacques, 60; and the gaze, 66
lastness / last, 4–20, 32, 53–55, 83, 102, 124n67; last thought, xi–3, 6, 9, 16–17, 62–63, 66, 75; last men, 60; and photography, 68, 72–73, 91–94; and poetry, 76, 79, 85, 90. *See also* perishing; *see also under* feeling; life; look, the; queer; romanticism; time; world
Levinas, Emmanuel, 39–40
life, 7, 29, 63, 80, 91, 101–2; biological, 59; and John Clare, 46–47; and death, 4, 84–85; end of (*see also under* ending); form-of, 44, 51, 55, 64–65, 72, 112n87; human, 9, 16, 48–49, 56, 61, 83, 132n78; and Immanuel Kant, 1–2, 19; last of, 6, 13, 14, 53, 70, 93; "life itself," 47, 49, 50, 52, 61, 73, 82; lifelessness, 31, 69, 76, 78, 83; line of, 55; nonlife, 13, 67, 83; poetic, 8, 58, 68, 82; queer, 11, 60; still, 6, 25, 107n25; vitalism, 12, 16; and world, 9, 36, 51, 78. *See also* biopolitics; perishing; posthumous; unlived; *see also under* Agamben, Giorgio; indifference; romanticism; survival
Lippit, Akira Mizuta, 106n6
look, the, 42, 70, 73; averted, 69, 76–80; last, 4, 6, 11, 13, 74, 91, 96–101; queer, 95; and romanticism, 81; and the unlived, 53, 85; worldless, 98. *See also under* inhuman
Lotringer, Sylvère, 110n61

Malabou, Catherine, 33, 53
Marriott, David, 107n28
materiality, 13, 45, 69, 85, 87, 123n38; and history, 67; materialism, 90, 129n25; matter, 35; and new historicism, 122n24; and painting, 21, 41, 106n20, 119n104; and resistance, 40. *See also under* inhuman; photography
McLaughlin, Kevin, 38
Meillassoux, Quentin, 23, 44–45
Miller, Steven, 83
Milnes, Tim, 50–51
Milton, John, 8; *Paradise Lost*, 26–28, 42, 82–84, 94, 115n35
Miyajima, Tatsuo, 19
modernism, 12, 118n83; modernity, xi, 7, 45, 48, 122n24
Monsiau, Nicolas-André: *The First Kiss of Love*, 11, 98–102
Morton, Timothy, 13

Nagel, Alexander, 6
Nancy, Jean-Luc, 34, 68, 73, 85, 111n79; and Aurélian Barrau, 113n21
nature, 5, 47, 50, 57, 70; "great outdoors," 45; and William Wordsworth, 8, 35–36, 56–57
negative, 2, 7, 40, 75, 98; attention, 3, 27, 76, 81, 116n51; capability, 69; concept, 39; force, 95; inscription, 40–41, 54; negativity, 24, 38, 54, 114n23, 119n104, 124n62, 130n49; photographic, 68, 69, 71, 95
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 32–33, 66

perception, 49, 56, 80–82, 39n129; inhuman, 131n73; partial, 27; sense-perception, 35, 82. *See also* photography
perishing, 16, 55–58, 69, 93; and Ray Brassier, 2; and Claire Colebrook, 53, 54; and romanticism, 12, 55; and the world, 6, 53, 57. *See also* ending
Phillips, Adam, 97
photography, 13, 21, 67, 92–94; materiality of, 67–68, 72, 91; photograph, 6, 11, 40, 66, 69–73, 78, 101–2, 126n94, 132n75; photographic, 84, 107n28, 116n51, 129n39 (*see also under* negative; time). *See also under* inhuman; lastness / last; unlived
poetic / poetry. *See under* ending; inhuman; lastness; life; unlived
Pointon, Marcia, 125n84
posthumous, 8, 66, 70, 72, 78, 126n94; existence, 11, 69
posterity, 35, 67, 94
Pyle, Forest, 111n75, 120n117, 127n15

queer, xi, 11, 17, 59, 65, 98, 100; and lastness, 14, 20, 78; performativity, 27. *See also* Hujar, Peter: *Triumph*; *see also under* life; look, the; romanticism

Rajan, Balachandra, 23
Rajan, Tilottama, 12, 75, 106n15
Redfield, Marc, 17, 105n5
Reiman, Donald H., 75, 95, 96
Ricco, John Paul, 13, 120n107, 129n36
Richardson, James E., 117n53
Robert, Hubert, 4–6, 19, 92, 106n20
romanticism, 4–20, 118n83; and lastness, 13, 15, 18, 58, 72, 74, 78; and life, 11–12, 68, 109n45, 122n24; and periodization, 17; queer, 20; romantic image, 20; "Romantic poets," 69; romantic studies, xi, 6–12, 44, 51–53. *See also under* extinction; inhuman; look, the; nature; perishing; Rousseau, Jean-Jacques
Ronell, Avital, 108n37
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 55; *Julie*, 96–98; and romanticism, 78–80, 97; and *The Triumph*, 11, 77–79, 82–86, 89, 90, 101–2, 128n25
ruin, 5, 25, 35; and disaster, 21, 22; and the humanities, 9; and love, 58; and photography, 94; ruination, 21, 25; ruins 4–8, 23, 48; world, 22

Said, Edward, 15
Schiller, Friedrich, 69
Schopenhauer, Arthur, 38, 81
Scott, James C., 75
Scranton, Roy, 15
Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, 27, 65, 72, 116n43
Seigworth, Gregory K., 117n53
Sendak, Maurice, 70, 72
Serres, Michel, 57
Shakespeare, William, 58
Shelley, Mary, 74, 78; *The Last Man*, 66, 126n3
Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 8, 9, 51, 54, 100, 114n23, 122n27; *The Triumph of Life*, 11, 74–83, 85–91, 96, 101–2 (*see also under* de Man, Paul; Derrida, Jacques)
Silverman, Kaja, 22, 126n94, 129n33, 130n47
Sontag, Susan, 93–94
Spivak, Gayatri, 38
Stewart, Susan, 113n18

sublime, the, 2, 54, 80
survival, xi, 2, 9, 62, 105n4, 108n38; human, 11, 16, 66; and life, 15, 52–54, 61; and D. W. Winnicott, 6, 13; and William Wordsworth, 7–8, 25, 123n38
suspension, 69, 86, 92
Swann, Karen, 69, 109n45
Szendy, Peter, 44, 120n115; and cinema, 25, 85, 130n49

Terada, Rei, 69, 127n11; *Looking Away*, 13, 95, 119n94
Thacker, Eugene: *In the Dust of This Planet*, 39, 40–41, 43
Tiffany, Daniel, 37–38
time; 4, 62, 67; duration, 27, 66, 94; of the earth, 7; interval of, 14; last, 27, 68, 105n4; mourning, 66; nonsequential, 70; and *Paradise Lost*, 26–27; photographic, 67, 71, 93; timeless, 19; timeline, 26, 60, 66; of today, 9, 65; untimely, xi, 16; and William Wordsworth, 8, 24–25, 71. *See also* ending: of history; inhuman: and temporality; Miyajima, Tatsuo; perishing; posthumous; romanticism: periodization; survival
trauma, 8, 13, 15, 16, 60; and history, 77, 78, 94; theory, 17
Turner, J. M. W., 47–49
Turrell, James, 87, 131n59

unlived, 34, 47, 53, 55, 101, 112n87; and Giorgio Agamben, 16; and care, 44; and extinction, 9; and photography 69, 72, and poetry, 82; unthought 17. *See also under* look, the

von Trier, Lars: *Melancholia*, 34, 38, 43, 60, 130n49

Wang, Orrin N. C., 110n58
Wark, McKenzie, 49, 52, 54
Winnicott, D. W. *See under* survival
witness, 4, 68, 76, 84, 98; unwittnessable, 26, 39, 46
Wolff, Norbert, 21
Wolfson, Susan, 115n35
Wollstonecraft, Mary, 115n41
Wordsworth, Dorothy, 64–65
Wordsworth, William, 1, 6–11, 51, 88, 120n116, 123n41; *The Prelude*, 24, 28, 55–58, 71, 107n30; "Resolution and Independence," 63–65, 124n62, 124n64; *The Ruined Cottage*, 128n24; and *The Somnambulists*, 66, 69; "To the Planet Venus," 42; and world, 22–25, 28–30, 32, 34–36, 44. *See also under* nature; survival; time
world, 2, 7, 10, 14, 20, 37; after-world, 4; and Hannah Arendt, 22–24, 36; concept of, 4, 8, 18, 40; and Jacques Derrida, 31–32; Edenic, 52; empty, 66, 91; interworld, 71, 75, 90; and Immanuel Kant, 30; and John Keats, 37; last, 13, 21, 45, 89; and Quentin Meillassoux, 45; modern, 48; nonworld, 22, 27, 28, 85; and *Paradise Lost*, 26–28, 83; planetary, 38–39, 42–44, 60; unlivable, 3, 9; unworlding, xi, 9; worldlessness, 17, 24, 31–32, 51, 92, 114n23; world-picture, 118n83. *See also under* ending; inhuman; life; perishing; ruin; Wordsworth, William

Žižek, Slavoj, 125n70

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